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[FORGIVEN.]

A SPRIG OF MISTLETOE:

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A Pretty Angler," "A Mysterious Husband,"
"A Little Love Chat," "Jack's First
Love," &c., &c.

CHAPTER IV.

AT PARTING.

Thou must now pursue
Thy silent way upon the starlit deep
When winds and waves have sung themselves to
sleep
And heaven is darkly blue.

In the good old days it was Queen Eleanor who was jealous of Fair Rosamond, but at Haganhaugh it was the other way about—Fair Rosamond was jealous of the queen.

Vida had never really known the feeling before, and it came upon her with a rush when she saw Paul in a deep confidential talk with Lois Lawstocke. The Haverlands, both men and women, had ever been of a jealous nature, and there were strange and thrilling stories told of jealous husbands, wives and lovers of the race; and Vida had all the deeper passions of her progenitors lying beneath the surface so pretty and smooth, and she was furious.

She knew a little of Lois and her lost hopes concerning Paul—for mothers will talk together

and afterwards let their daughters share the secrets they hear. Lady Lawstocke when offering her congratulations to Mrs. Haverland had spiced her words with the bitterness in her soul, and through Mrs. Haverland it reached Vida.

"So do not trust too much to the friendship of Lois," the careful mother advised, "as it may be a mask. No woman looks upon a man as utterly lost to her until he has married another. On the other hand, my dear Vida, no woman ought to be sure of a man until she is his wife."

Mrs. Haverland did not extend her advice to what ought to be done after marriage, knowing that experience would then be an unerring guide. The colonel had not been quite ALL she expected, but she was wise enough to accept him as he was and make the best of him. The result was—happiness.

Paul Legarde read Vida's face, and at first was disposed to resent the look she gave him. No woman, he thought, had a right to doubt him after he had plighted his word, and a very pretty little quarrel was in the course of being hatched when he suddenly remembered that it was his last night in England and if he and Vida had a rupture there might not be time to repair the mischief.

His mind was accurately read by Lois, and she held him to her side until a cool and collected Eton lad came to claim her for a dance. She tried to get rid of him by asserting she was tired, but he was not to be refused, as he afterwards in writing an account of the evening to a friend said, "I stand no nonsense from any woman, they don't throw me over and dodge me out of a dance when once I have planted myself on their list."

As soon as he was free Paul went in search of Vida and found her dancing in the highest spirits with Cater Wadmore, and this was a great offence in his eyes.

"Any man on earth but him," muttered Paul, "and she knows it. What humbugs women are, but I won't please her by letting her see I am angry."

She was engaged to him for the next waltz and he went to claim her with the elaborate politeness angry lovers sometimes show when offended, and Vida, bowing in a pretty sarcastic way, was "glad to find he had not forgotten her." Then they linked themselves together and floated round the room.

How could a man hold such a little treasure in his arms and keep his ill-temper? Paul melted immediately and wanted to make his peace with her, opening diplomatic proceedings with a gentle pressure of the hand.

"Are you sure you do not mistake me for Lois?" said Vida.

"No, darling," he whispered. "How can you be so absurd?"

"I am not absurd. Did I not see you together?"

"Yes, but there was nothing in it. Will you sit down and let me explain?"

"Nothing can ever explain it to my satisfaction," insisted Vida.

But she allowed him to lead her to a seat in the corner of the hall, and he frankly told her every word that had passed between him and Lois.

"Nothing in it all," he said, "a thoughtless utterance of an old friend sorry I am going away, and nothing more."

"I mistrust Lois," replied Vida, "and have always done so, but never so much as now."

As the wound inflicted appeared difficult to heal there he led her to the picture gallery, arranged for a lounge and promenade. It was almost deserted, and in a quiet corner he made his peace.

"You will love me always, Paul?"

"While I live."

"And never—never send me back my poor little sprig of mistletoe?"

"Never."

"But if you should ever wish to kill me, Paul—"

"Don't be such a dear little goose, Vida."

"If ever you wish to kill me send it back."

"My darling, it can never be."

So all was signed and sealed and the temporary shadows presumably forgotten, but the memory of that night was destined hereafter to rack the mind and torture the heart of the pretty, loving Vida, and put up a barrier of granite between her and Paul Legarde.

While the lovers were renewing their vows old Lady Lawstocke was giving her daughter the benefit of a motherly lecture upon the proprieties, which was not received with the attention and reverence that were due to it. Lois in fact was rebellious and in a subdued manner defied the parental authority.

Upon quarrelling, not entirely new to them, could not be indulged in, for they were seated on an ottoman with people on every side of them. Anything above an ordinary tone would be sure to become public property.

"So indiscreet of you, my dear Lois," said Lady Lawstocke, "taking an engaged man off for a tete-a-tete."

"I see nothing in it," Lois replied.

"Nothing. What will the other men think of you? Besides, it is already whispered about that we have angled for and lost him."

"I have not lost him yet, I tell you," said Lois. "If I could have had him another ten minutes to myself I would have cut the tie between him and Vida, but that evil Ravensley insisted upon claiming me for the Lanciers, and I lost that chance."

"You are too fond of encouraging boys," said Lady Lawstocke.

"I must have my list full. Would you have me on the shelf already?"

"You are going on a fair way to put yourself there, Lois. Men won't marry a woman who is known to have a love for another."

"I may marry Paul Legarde yet."

"You will no more marry him than I shall marry—the man in the moon," said Lady Lawstocke, violently fanning herself.

"I wish you could marry him," replied Lois, "for I am sure you would, and then I should not be bothered so much with every little petty thing you are pleased to think an outrage upon Mrs. Grundy."

"Lois!"

"Oh, it is all very well, mother, but I am tired of being worried about nothing. You have been scheming these two years to get a husband for me, and have failed most signally. Now I am going to look about for myself, with better success, I hope."

"If you marry without my consent, Lois—"

"Now, my dear mother, of course when I get the man I want I hope to have your consent. It is a right and dutiful feeling to desire it. But should my future husband be displeasing to you, I will endeavour to live without your blessing."

"I must talk to you by-and-by when I am cooler," said Lady Lawstocke, twirling her fan furiously.

Lois made no answer, but leaning back surveyed the moving life around her with an impassable face, until she saw Paul and Vida returning from the picture-gallery. The sight of their radiant faces drove the life-blood back upon her heart.

"You see," sneered her mother. "Do you think a hole-and-corner flirtation ten minutes long will separate them?"

"I have not lost him yet, I tell you," replied Lois. "Oh! there is Cater Wadmore. What do you think of him?"

"A snob," replied the old woman, curtly.

"But very rich, mother dear, and we are poor," said Lois.

"For Heaven's sake don't think of that man," said Lady Lawstocke, angrily. "What would your uncle Lord Amondten say?"

"What he would be pleased to remark would be immaterial. He is no assistance to us. But I do not think I shall marry this Wadmore. It lies between him and Paul Legarde. Failing either, I cannot answer for what will become of me."

Lady Lawstocke was in a very perturbed state of mind. She and Lois, both being worldly and hardhearted, had often had little tiffs before, but the reckless utterances and open defiance of her daughter were quite a new thing. She knew something of the nature hidden within Lois, and shuddered at the thought of what she might possibly do when in an angry or a reckless mood.

The ball was kept up until towards morning, and the last left as the cold, grey light was stealing up from the east. Many kindly adieux and good wishes were exchanged with Paul, and he and Vida both retired with haste, bright with the light of the future. Beaumont had spent a very pleasant hour or two and was content, but two of the guests were in a very discontented mood.

One was Cater Wadmore—the other Lois Lawstocke.

Just before the break-up they were standing apart, and exchanging a few words, for Cater Wadmore, like Lady Lawstocke, was not quite satisfied with the conduct of Lois, and did not hesitate to say so. He was very open and flip-pant, not to say slightly impertinent, and called her "Lois" in the tone of one who had a right to do so.

"You have been trying it on with Legarde," he said, "and it won't do. You must keep to our compact—breaking them up and marrying me. Remember that, Lois."

"I don't know that you've a right to exact so much from me," she said. "We are both free agents still."

"No, no," he said, banteringly, "I can't have that. The bond was made, and signed and sealed. I hold you to the letter and spirit of it. If you fail you will repent of it."

"You dare to threaten me?" she asked, with flashing eyes.

"No—only to warn," he answered. "Come, don't be foolish, Lois. A bargain is a bargain, no matter who makes it. I tell you this much—that if you break faith with me I will have no mercy upon you. Marry me, and I will spoil you with love and tenderness. I will make you the envied of women. In home, jewels, and carriages you shall outvie them all. I will heap up riches before you, and you shall be a queen and I your slave."

She saw the mocking sneer beneath his fine words, and began to understand him. He was a different man to what she had hitherto deemed him to be. There was a master spirit enshrined in his warm nature that could not be easily subdued. But she had a master spirit too, and time might prove that hers was the stronger.

"Fulfil but half your promises," she said, "and you will be more than man. Good night. We are the last."

He held out his hand, and she extended hers. The two palms met, and the strangely engaged pair looked into each other's eyes. Each saw that the other was handsome, and the attraction that exists in such matters drew them nearer to each other.

"Lois," he said, stealthily glancing around to see if they were observed, "if I were to tell you I loved you would you believe me?"

"Not yet," she answered. "I know something of the world and am difficult to convince. I must have more than assertion. Give me proof."

"Give me an opportunity to lay it before you," he said. "Will you keep your word? Will you reward me as it was promised in the compact?"

She looked at his handsome face and the form that, with a better spirit within it, might have been noble, and the lower yearnings of her

nature furnished the answer. It must be better to have him for a spouse than to live alone.

"Yes," she said, and made no resistance as he bestowed a kiss upon her lips—the second he had ever given her.

She went away from him miserable and brooding, and spent several wakeful hours ere she slept, trying to paint the picture of a future that would see her Cater Wadmore's wife. She tried to make it something pleasant—at all events endurable; but grim figures of hate and faithlessness and shame would rise in spite of her and air their ghastly forms before her sleepless eyes.

"And yet I might have loved him," she murmured, "if he had wooed me as an honest man. Oh, for one year with a man who could love me unselfishly—truthfully—living for me, filling the void in an aching heart and soothing the passionate tumult of my spirit. One year of such happiness and I would freely lay down my life. But it can never be mine—never."

And he, Cater Wadmore, the cold, cynical schemer who had always lived for the world, with no yearning for aught above its grosser pleasures, was restless too. The southern beauty of Lois had warmed him like a sun, and brought forth a luxuriant growth of tangled grass and weeds of passion, which he thought was love, and he was irritated with himself. Why had he not wooed her in a form more genial and won her heart? He could have played the lover as well as any other man—if he had thought of her at first as he did that night.

"And she can love," he said, "love with something above the cool, evenly-flowing stream that passes current among the English women for affection. But now what will she be? My wife—ah! yes, my wife in name, in heart perhaps a foe. To keep her to me I must break her. I must ruin the toy to keep others from stealing it. I can do that, I know, and when it is done what then, wise Cater Wadmore?"

He could only guess what would be the end of it all, and he did not care to dwell upon it, and so looked back and pondered again on what she might have been to him if he had only begun his wooing well.

"If he had done so. We all know how fatal the 'if' has been to us so many times in the course of our career, and may perchance feel a little sympathy with the man of the world who was beginning to find out too late the roughness of the path of life he had chosen."

The shoes of selfishness were wearing out and the thorns and briars of regret springing up, the hand of the avenger was scattering flints upon his road; but he must go on—for men and women there is no halting, no turning back, the way chosen must be trodden though every step be watered with our tears.

CHAPTER V.

IS IT WISE TO LOVE?

The world is a delightful place to dwell in, And many sweet and lovely things are in it, Yet there are some for whom we have A natural dislike—I love not thee.

NIGHT is the time for yearning, repentance and good resolutions, and the exercise of all the better faculties we possess. When darkness is on the earth our warmer impulses are in full play. We breathe soft vows if we love, swear eternal friendship if we have friends, and if we are ambitious our hopes are then at their brightest.

The morning's light brought back the everyday nature of Lois Lawstocke and Cater Wadmore, and at breakfast both were wondering what had made them so very sentimental on the previous night. He saw in her a very handsome woman and she beheld in him a handsome man, and nothing more.

"If we marry," she thought, "we can jog on like sensible married people, not interfering too much with each other; but I must not think much of it at present, I may not marry him after all."

There were similar thoughts in his head.

Lois was very pleasing to the eye, and he had great powers of appreciation where women were concerned, so he thought she would make a very becoming mistress of his house, unless he had the good fortune to marry somebody else who held him in stronger chains.

These two schemers were traitors to each other. Linked together with a common object they were bent upon executing it, but when once it was carried out it was their intention not to complete the compact if they could carry out something more desirable.

Paul Legarde, after a long parting with Vida in a quiet nook upstairs, took leave of the rest and went away followed with many expressed good wishes, some from the heart and others from the lips, and all acceptable. If we do not quite believe in people we like them to say pretty things to us, soft words are always soothing.

In the afternoon Cater Wadmore received a telegram from London, and having read it he sought out the colonel, who was playing billiards with Lois Lawstocke. Beaumont sat in a corner looking on and smoking a cigar.

"Sorry to interrupt you, colonel," said Wadmore, "pardon me, Miss Lawstocke, but I am called away; must go by the four-fifteen train and it is now three-thirty."

"But you will return to-morrow?" the colonel hospitably suggested.

"I fear not. There are a lot of things I have to look to. By the way," here Cater Wadmore lowered his voice, "when are you coming up?"

"Not until the season," the colonel said. "But you are losing time. Come and look into the things I named to you. Worth your while, depend on it. Fifteen per cent. and no risk."

"I'll think of it, Wadmore."

"Well, good bye. Where is Miss Lawstocke? Melted away like a fairy, disgusted with my interruption. Really, colonel, I am awfully sorry—"

"Don't put yourself out about her," said Beaumont, removing his cigar lazily from his lips. "Miss Lawstocke, I should say, has gone away to cry over your departure. I saw tears in her eyes as she evaporated from the room."

"You flatter me," replied Wadmore, "but I know it is your kind way, that's all. I don't think the fair Lois or I will ever weep much for each other."

He shook hands with Beaumont, but the colonel said he would see him again, would, in fact, accompany him to the station just to talk over that little idea of investment.

When he had left to look to his packing Beaumont said to his father:

"What is Wadmore putting into your head about investment?"

"A new thing on," replied the colonel, "something in the mine way, and I am to be a director—a safe fifteen per cent. for us he says—"

"But you wouldn't go in for a swindle, I know, and this appears to be something like it."

"Wadmore tells me that it is a certainty for everybody, and as soon as the public get a full scent of it the shares will all be disposed of and at a premium."

"I shall be glad of an extra allowance," said Beaumont, thoughtfully, "for I have gone a little back—"

"You must keep out of debt, Beaumont."

"I try to, sir, but you know what our mess is, and I can't play the recluse—must go out a little—"

"Well, Beaumont," said the colonel, "if I can see my way to a better way of putting out my money than I have at present I'll do it. Wadmore is a good fellow and can be trusted."

"Let us hope so," said Beaumont, yawning, and he took out another cigar.

Cater Wadmore, in leaving the billiard-room, which was on the ground floor, ascended the staircase and turned down the corridor that led to his room. Midway he encountered Lois pacing up and down, and looking, as he could not help thinking, uncommonly like a very handsome, restless tiger in a cage.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said.

"Why did you leave us so suddenly?"

"Your announcement startled me," she replied.

"Granted. But I gave you credit for being a woman of nerve. You let that young cub Beaumont see that you were agitated."

"I was angry, not agitated. Tell me why you were going without notice, and, as far as I can see, without reflection."

"I assure you, Lois, that it is one part of a well-reflected-upon and well-digested programme. I am going up to town to see a friend who is to aid us in our little project."

"And you must go to-day?"

"By the four-fifteen, dearest, so we must be quick with our adieux. Loving each other as we do—"

"Enough of folly," she said, impatiently. "I would as soon be on the rack as have to listen to a man who insults me with mockery."

He looked at her proud and beautiful face, and something of the feeling of the night before returned to him. She was a woman whose heart was worth having to a man who knew how to keep it. Melting a little, and laying aside his air of cynicism, he took her hand and said:

"Lois, it is a pity that we do not really love each other."

"Why?" she asked, abruptly.

"Because we then could lay aside this rascally scheming, marry at once, and live the life of an honest, loving married couple."

Her lips parted with a smile of doubt, and she shook her head in derision of the idea.

"Loving, honest people," she said, "are scarce, and you and I are above the fooling of boys and girls."

"Most excellent fooling it is sometimes," he said.

"Why, Lois, DARLING!"—she stared at him as he uttered the word with a passionate emphasis—"the world has made me hard, but there are times when I struggle and fight within my shell, longing to be free. I think you and I might have done better if we had begun more reasonably."

"I don't understand you."

"I mean if we had begun more like real lovers, more like the inhabitants of that Arcadia where Cupid dwells, if I had shown more of the real lover, you more of the coyness and tenderness of women. Do you understand me?"

"I would rather not," she said, hurriedly.

"I should be afraid of having a heart."

"You have one, Lois," he said. "You must—your eyes tell of its existence. Give it play. Let me begin my wooing over again. Forget the cold contract, the flippant first kiss, the careless acknowledgment of the bond."

"No," she replied. "I will not let my heart loose to any man whom I know so little of as I do of you."

"You will not trust me?"

"I dare not. You might be cruel, and I think you are. Even if it wrung your own heart you might take pleasure in crushing mine. Better keep to a cool, business agreement and leave love-making to others."

"Impossible, Lois. I feel a growing yearning for your love."

"When I am near you—yes. But when I am away?"

"It cools," he replied, frankly, "but it may not be always so. If you will cultivate this barren breast of mine, the warmth of your nature may rear some flowers there. Looking now into your passionate eyes, upon your perfect face, I feel it will be so—Lois—Lois—"

"Go," she said, laughingly, interrupting him. "You forget how time travels—you will lose your train."

He stopped short, and cooled down suddenly like a thermometer taken from a warm room to the icy air of winter. A smile spread over his face as he took her hands in his.

"You are right," he said. "You have the better head of the two. It will never do for either of us to give up our reason for the madness of youth. We will live and love like sensible people. Good bye."

He kissed her again, bowed, and walked off humming a tune. Referring to his watch, he

found the time was flying fast. It was close upon four o'clock, and when he reached his room he rang the bell to know if there was a conveyance for him at the door. The answer was in the affirmative, with the addition that the colonel was waiting to drive him to the station.

"How long does it take to get there?" he asked.

"A quarter of an hour," the man replied, "but the train is generally ten minutes late."

"Help me to pack, will you, please? Here is a slight recognition of the services you have performed for me during my stay."

The man slipped the sovereign given him into his pocket, and expertly packed the portmanteau in something under five minutes, Cater Wadmore, always particular about his dress, occupying the time in giving a few touches to his toilet, musing the while.

"She is gaining a power over me when I am with her. Away I could easily forget her. She is wise. Love between us would be ridiculous—a blunder—and is not to be thought of for a moment. Am I to marry her then? I don't know. I must leave that until I see how the GREAT game goes on. Love for Lois, handsome Lois, with the fickle eyes and treacherous mouth—no, THAT would be folly, but with gentle, loving, confiding, trusting Vida, it would be quite another thing."

CHAPTER VI.

A LETTER FROM PERSIA.

But soon the transient gleam of light
Like morning visions fades away,
And gloom comes here with tenfold might
To chase my love away.

THE guests at Haganhaugh were all gone and the Haverlands were left alone.

The colonel and his wife gave themselves up to counting the cost.

Beaumont, after a day's yawning about the stables, returned to his regiment, and Vida gave up a vast amount of her time to mentally following Paul upon his journey.

He wrote from Paris a letter evidently hurried, which he accounted for by grumbling at the haste the embassy travelled.

Something important was intended with Persia, he wrote, but what it was for the life of him he could not tell.

Diplomatic secrets, according to him, were secrets even from the diplomatic body. Ergo, there could be no secrets to tell.

Vida wrote direct to the destination of the embassy, as any address short of it would be too late to overtake Paul, and then sat down to await one from him, which could not possibly arrive for many weeks unless he wrote again on the way.

As a matter of fact and a matter of right, Vida expected to hear from him again.

A lover, if he is really in love, would never let half a dozen halting places slip by without a line, although he had no chance of getting a reply, but Paul sent not a word.

Vida tried to think that he had no opportunity to write, but her reason refused to be convinced.

He could have despatched half a score letters if he had chosen, and he sent not one.

Pretty Vida tried to think she was not slighted, for her love for Paul was very deep. With the innocence of a thoroughly honest nature she had given him her whole heart, and all her world was Paul.

But she thought he was unkind when he must have known what a few words from him were to her.

But she did not complain. What she felt was kept to herself, for fear of being led into disloyalty to her love.

By and bye she might perhaps hear the reason of his silence, indeed she was sure she would, and it was her duty—nay, should be her joy—to hold him faithful and to believe he was all she deemed him from the first.

Mrs. Haverland thought it odd Paul did not write again, and told the colonel so, but the colonel was busy with prospectuses and plans

and goodness knows how many papers sent to him by Cater Wadmore, all pointing out the road to wealth, and could not be troubled.

"It is just like you women," he said, "you think a man in love has nothing else in the world to think of. Don't go putting all sorts of things into Vida's head about his being faithless."

"My dear," remonstrated Mrs. Haverland, with all the indignation she could summon into her amiable nature, "how can you think so ill of me?"

"I don't think ill of you," the colonel replied, as he stooped down and kissed her, "unless I have thought so from the first hour we met. Paul Legarde is all right, straight as a gun barrel, and if he hasn't written so often as was expected there is good reason for it."

With this Mrs. Haverland was obliged to be contented, and having been put into her normal state of good nature with another kiss she gave herself up to another review of the expenditure of the past year, and a discussion upon the necessity of doing something to increase their income.

The scheme which Cater Wadmore had brought to the notice of the colonel seemed to point in that direction.

Wealth not only loomed in the distance, but, according to the prospectus, was coming down with rapid strides to fall into the arms of men wise enough to become shareholders.

"Here is what Wadmore says," said the colonel, extracting a letter from a heap of papers, "he marks it 'important and private'; shall I read it to you?"

"If the letter is not too long," said Mrs. Haverland, with a smile. "We poor women have bad heads for business, and if you try to put in more than we hold, a great deal, and perhaps the most valuable part will run over."

"I have a different opinion about women," replied the colonel, "they have something better than mere business capacity, and that is an instinctive perception of the right and wrong, the wise and unwise thing to do. Their intelligence is as keen as the scent of a thoroughbred dog."

"But the letter, dear."

"Ah, yes. I will only read an extract; here it is. 'If you let this opportunity go by for another week it will be lost. There are several men eager to get hold of a good thing like this. Will you throw it away?' That is what Wadmore says. What are we to say?"

"I do not like Mr. Wadmore," said Mrs. Haverland, dubiously shaking her head, "he does not ring like true metal to me."

"But the man himself," urged the colonel, "does not detract from the value of this investment. We want money. Beaumont wants money. Vida must have a dowry when she marries."

"Paul Legarde does not desire it."

"Granted. But it ill becomes us to take advantage of his generous spirit. I make barely four per cent. of my money now. This scheme promises a good ten per cent., perhaps twelve—perhaps more."

In the end the colonel prevailed and Cater Wadmore was communicated with.

He came in person, bringing the required shares with him, and when the business was settled the colonel pressed him to stay. Wadmore accepted the invitation.

Now or never was the time to make himself agreeable to Vida, although he dare not openly show his hand.

That could only be revealed when the measure of his iniquity was full—that is, when a scheme he had in action had borne fruit in the separation of the lovers.

Vida did not like him, but he was not actually repulsive to her.

He had good looks, and when at his best there was a fascination in his manner that was almost as good to look at as the sounder metal such men as Paul Legarde are made of.

He was deferential, courteous, and attentive to Vida as a visitor might be, and neither said or did anything calculated to rouse the least suspicion.

Life at Haganhaugh without visitors was rather lonely, and as the days wore on Vida began to feel the presence of Cater Wadmore as a relief to the well-known monotony of home life. He walked and rode with her, played tennis and billiards with her, and although the colonel or Mrs. Haverland was always with them on these occasions, he insensibly led Vida to think of being alone with him.

This feeling grew familiar, so that one day at noon when she was going to the village on an errand of charity she met him returning from a stroll, and was not at all surprised or displeased by his coolly turning back to accompany her.

He did it very cleverly by making an allusion to Persia, a country he seemed to be familiar with. He began by speaking of the embassy sent out, and then went into a glowing description of the wild beauty of its scenery, the quaint nature of its architecture, and, lastly, the fascination of its women.

"Are they so very beautiful?" asked Vida, with her interest thoroughly aroused.

She thought of Paul, of the letters that did not come, and her little heart quaked with a new and rapidly growing dread.

"As a race," replied Cater Wadmore, with a quick side glance at the line upon her brow, and rosy lips parted with apprehension, "I know of no women like them. There are however a few here who surpass them. I know of one, at least, myself"—he smiled, hoping she would look up and understand him, but she kept her eyes fixed ahead upon a vision of Paul wooing a Persian houri—"of one—who—far surpasses them."

"But they are all—what is it called?—set apart to marry the men of their race, are they not?" Vida asked, after a silence.

"Oh, no," replied Wadmore, "for I never knew an Englishman over there yet who did not fall in love, and most of them were married to a daughter of the land of Cashmere shawls and jewels."

"You have been in Persia?"

"Yes, and came back scatheless. After my return I was spoken of at the clubs as they would of a man who had run the gauntlet of a savage land and come back without a wound."

All this idle talk of the schemer would have fallen flat upon a woman of the world. She would have known its worth and guessed at once his object. But Vida, in her innocence, accepted it all as a revelation in a casual chat, spoken without an object, but terribly pregnant with a destructive power to her peace.

He saw her brooding and talked no more until she had had time to fairly take into her bosom the demon of mistrust, and then he turned to other matters, on the principle of having done enough work for one day. He was far too clever to overdo anything appertaining to business or pleasure.

Before they reached the village Vida felt the impropriety she had been guilty of in walking alone through a retired part of the country with a young and handsome man. He was a guest it was true, but that ought to have set up a higher barrier against such an indiscreet step. Eyes are so sharp where young people are concerned and tongues so glib in running off conclusions.

But there was no help for it. He had come thus far and could not be sent back. She must risk what people might think and say, and they went on together.

Apparently Cater Wadmore was unconscious of having at all compromised her, and the meeting with a couple of carriages, each containing two or three of the county people out on formal visiting, did not call him to a sense of duty. Vida did give him one hint, but he would not take it.

"I am going to call upon a poor, sick old woman," she said, "and I daresay she will like me to remain an hour or so. Pray don't let me take you any farther."

"I have nothing to do," he replied, "and I shall be delighted if you will allow me to wait for you."

She was inclined to be angry with him for his

pertinacity, but as he appeared to be utterly unconscious of doing anything distasteful to her she could say or do nothing.

They went on together. Vida spent an hour with the sick woman, while he walked up and down outside smoking a cigar until he was required to accompany her home.

At dinner he spoke openly of their stroll, and with a cool audacity that very nearly won him a great victory, offered himself as a cavalier for the next occasion. The colonel put down his proposal to an ignorance of the terrible ruling of Mrs. Grundy and said nothing, but Mrs. Haverland, more prudent, spoiled the proposal.

"I must take up with the parish again," she said, "and Vida will go with me. But if at any time during your stay you like to accompany us we shall be pleased with your society."

He said he would be delighted, but if it could have been possible to put into his face what was in his heart the nature of his delight would have been viewed with amazement.

On the whole he was satisfied. A little reflection told him that he had established a right to approach Vida with a certain amount of familiarity, and he was not the man to take up his foot after it was once down. In the drawing-room he talked again to her of Persia and its many fascinations, and with consummate art, while professedly endeavouring to amuse her, succeeded in making her utterly miserable.

That night her pillow was wet with tears. Struggling against the growing fear did not avail her. All her faith in Paul could not raise the dark shadow settling down. She was beginning to taste some of the weariness and bitterness of life. The book was opened and the lesson had to be learned and taken to heart whether she would or not.

Having once set the ball rolling, Cater Wadmore kept it going during his stay, and the secret power he exercised was never once suspected or detected. The change in the appearance of the pretty Vida was not ascribed to his influence.

"At last the time came for him to go. He could no longer prolong his stay without taking an unpardonable advantage of the colonel's hospitality. So he went, and at leaving suggested something about their coming to London at once."

"Not to be thought of," the colonel said.

"You really ought to come," replied Wadmore; "we must see something of you as a director."

"Yes, but consider the expense," said the colonel, uneasily.

"There is a hundred a year allowed for each director," said Wadmore, "and the first half-year's dividend will put your little expenditure right. Let me enlist you on my side, Mrs. Haverland."

"Vida would be all the better for a change," said Mrs. Haverland, hesitating, "and we need not live in the most expensive place."

"I will consider it settled," said Cater Wadmore, "and will get you comfortable rooms at a reasonable price somewhere up West."

It was settled he should do so, and he went away satisfied. All was going on as well as he could hope or desire. Nobody had told him of there being no letter from Paul, but nobody knew so well as he the reason why.

Two days passed and he wrote to say he had secured excellent rooms at the Piccadilly end of Saville Street in the house of a tailor who occupied the ground floor and let the rest. There was, of course, a private entrance, and the last tenant had been a bachelor lord who had shown great pluck in getting rid of his money and having himself enrolled in the list of bankrupts.

On the third day of April the Haverland family arrived in town, and on the seventh came the long-expected letter from Paul, re-addressed from Haganhaugh. The colonel handed it with a smile to Vida.

"There is balm for you," he said. "Go up to your room and enjoy it alone. I never would open my love letters in the presence of others."

She took it, and with every nerve tingling with joy, hastened up to the seclusion of her



[UNMASKED.]

chamber. Then she locked the door, and with palpitating heart and trembling fingers opened the precious envelope.

Inside it there was a sheet of note paper, but not a word or a line. Only a piece of withered mistletoe lay within its folds.

Were I possessed of a gift of word painting hitherto unknown I could not make you feel and know from my words alone the agony of the injured Vida. As the lightning's flash will wither the sapling root and branch, so that terrible missive struck her down. Picture her in her wild and frenzied grief if you can. It is not in my power to describe it.

(To be Continued.)

VERA'S VENTURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"So Fair Her Face," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XIX.

A RECOGNITION AND AN ACCIDENT.

A strange coincidence—to use a phrase
By which such things are settled now-a-days.

"REALLY, Nellie, your infatuation about that person is too ridiculous; you'll repent it, mark my words, before long."

"What is the matter now, Aunt Sarah?"

Lady Rivers had bounced into her niece's morning room on the morning of the day after Esther Morton's unwarrantable investigation of the contents of the old escritoire. Her ladyship looked very indignant and was full of some fresh grievance. That in itself was nothing new, Lady Rivers always had a grievance on hand, but this was evidently a big one.

"Why, you are making a perfect fool of yourself about that woman; the idea of listening to her megrims and giving her leave to do what she likes with herself for a whole day! You will have all your other servants rise up in open rebellion."

"Oh, dear, I hope not," Nellie said, with a smile, "that would be a dreadful state of things, Aunt Sarah. I don't think there is much harm done. Morton is totally unfit for any work to-day, and I preferred letting her go out, since she thought the air would set her to rights, to having her about the house suffering."

"What is the matter with her?"

"Neuralgia, she says; and indeed she looks ill enough to warrant my giving her this much relaxation. She has worked very hard and very well."

"I don't deny that," her ladyship said. She would have liked to secure the services of Esther Morton for herself even though she disliked her as she did, for she had never seen anyone who could put a dress together and make up old things to look like new as this impertinent stranger could.

Esther had gone to her mistress rather early in the morning with such a white, suffering face and distraught manner that Nellie had at once seen that something was amiss, and, learning that she had been suffering for several days from acute neuralgia, asked what would do her good.

The girl replied that she thought a few hours out of doors would cure her sooner than anything, and Nellie responded by offering her a holiday for the entire day. The work was well ahead and she could be spared, and if her pain was really nervous and the result in any way of the confinement and sitting, a change was the very best thing to cure it.

Esther thanked her warmly and went her way, bringing down upon Nellie her aunt's hottest displeasure by her too great consideration for her servants.

"She's an impudent hussy, Nellie, and will

show herself in her true light before long, mark my words," the irate lady said.

But Nellie only laughed and said she was not afraid.

Meanwhile the object of her ladyship's animadversion went her way.

She did not spend her holiday in Springfield, but walked to a little out-of-the-way station across the fields and took the train for London—not quite unnoticed, for Neville Delamere came up to her as she was walking to the station and greeted her with the familiarity that was always part of his manner to her when they were unobserved.

"Whither away, my beauty?" he asked.

"To London," she replied, shortly.

"To London? What on earth for?"

"To recruit my health by a holiday," she said, demurely. "If you ask my mistress," with a bitter emphasis on the words, "she will tell you I am very poorly and need a change."

"She will I daresay," he retorted, "but that's not the truth; I don't believe you are any more ill than I am."

"I am; I never slept a wink all last night; but I have something else in view in going to town besides recruiting my bodily strength."

"I could have sworn that. What is it? What are you going to do?"

"I am going to win Milverstone for myself—and you," she added, in a low undertone as she hastily parted from him, for they saw someone coming that looked very like Mr. Deacon, and though the worthy rector was somewhat obtuse it would hardly do to give him so much to think of as an interview between Miss Rivers's intended husband and the stranger she had admitted into her house as her maid.

"What can she mean?" Neville said to himself as he watched her retreating footsteps, "going to win Milverstone, is she? I wonder how; she'll have a tough job, I'm thinking. Sir Darcie left it pretty securely to Nellie, I fancy."

I don't see how my magnificent Vera is going to upset his arrangements."

Mr. Leicester was in town on that day, and chance led him to a druggist's shop the proprietor of which was very well known to him. It was close to one of the large stations in the north of London, and did a large miscellaneous business.

Talking with the master of the establishment in the little retiring-room behind the shop the doctor from Springfield suddenly saw a figure enter which he felt sure he knew.

There was the black dress and the neat, close bonnet that the servants of Milverstone Grange wore, and the springy step and erect carriage of the girl Esther Morton. He had often noticed her peculiar gait, there was something so different in it to the usual walk of people brought up as she declared herself to have been. That alone would have made him doubt her story. What was she doing in London? and what did she want at the druggist's shop?

"Do you know her?" asked the proprietor of the place.

"I think I do—do you?"

"She has been here once before. Ah! I thought it was the same person," as Esther Morton turned her face in their direction, all unconscious that she was being watched. "It is the girl that bought the—"

"The what?"

"Well, perhaps I may put wrong ideas into your head if I tell you she distinctly told me what it was for and all about it. I believed her myself."

"I have very pronounced ideas respecting that young person," Mr. Leicester replied. "I think I can guess what she bought, it was either belladonna or aconite in some form or other."

"Why, you must be a wizard," was the astonished reply, "she did buy aconite, and I felt rather doubtful about serving her with it in the form she wanted. I modified what she asked for a good deal. I hope she did no mischief with it."

"Oh, pray don't think I intended any such implication as that," Belton Leicester said, with a smile, though he had grave eyes while it played about his mouth. "She is a very clever young person is that, and knows very well how to take care of herself. May I know what she has purchased this time?"

"Surely. Come this way and we will see."

Not poison this time, but a very strong acid. She gave as a reason for wanting it that she had had an accident with something that did not belong to her and wanted to remove obstinate stains. What the substance to be operated on was she did not say.

Mr. Leicester was puzzled. He had no business to interfere with Miss Rivers's new attendant, but he doubted her, and he would be very glad when Nellie was married and out of the way of this scheming and plotting person. Very glad, he said to himself, and so he would be for her sake. He would be glad of anything that would conduce to her happiness, but there would be a sick pain at his heart and an aching void in his life that nothing but Nellie's bright face and sweet voice could fill. He loved her, there was no mistaking his feelings now, not with the unrestrained, boyish passion he had felt for poor Lettice Gower, but with the quiet, truthful love of a man's whole heart. He hid it manfully and struggled with it as only an honest man will struggle with a passion that he may not reveal, and he felt sure of the victory over himself.

He knew that he could give Neville Delamere's bride honest, hearty greeting when she came to her home a wife, and she would never know that the obscure village doctor had dared to lift his eyes to her with thoughts of love. He thought a good deal about Esther Morton as he made his way home again in the evening, but he saw no more of her: and after all her affairs were no business of his, unless she tried her hand at something very like murder, as he had every reason to suspect she had done in Wilson's case.

She wanted the girl ousted for some reason so that she might take her place, as had exactly come to pass.

He caught himself wondering what she wanted in London a good many times that day, but he could come to no satisfactory explanation on the matter. Doubtless Nellie had sent her, but he fancied there had been something surreptitious about her as if she did not want to be seen. There had been a furtive looking round as she stood at the counter that had not escaped the quick eye of the doctor. There were secrecy and stealth in her proceedings, and he determined to make it his business to watch Miss Esther Morton very closely when he got back to Springfield. But "Man proposes," etc., says the old proverb. Mr. Leicester found so much to absorb his attention from the moment of his arrival at home that for a time he forgot all about Nellie's protégée and her doings entirely.

Without any idea that she had been observed or her actions commented on, Vera Rivers made her way to Bloomsbury, and knocked at the door of one of the old-fashioned houses in the square. She had been there many a time in her mother's lifetime, for it was the house of the lawyer who had done what little legal business her parents had required.

She had had nothing to trouble Mr. Shackleton about lately, and he had lost sight of her completely. Actors and actresses were not in his line, and if he thought about Miss Rivers at all he fancied that she had gone abroad as so many of her profession did, and had perhaps settled out of England.

He did not recognise her at first and she had to tell him her name before he recalled the features of the handsome girl he used to wonder at as being the daughter of pretty, gentle Mrs. Rivers. She resembled her father's family, the mother used to say when any remark was made about Vera, and there was sufficient resemblance to certain dead-and-gone scions of the Rivers race to warrant the statement.

It was afternoon, almost past the time for clients, when the young lady was ushered into the lawyer's room and was announced as Miss Rivers. Mr. Shackleton was a wiry little man with sharp, ferret-like eyes and a hard, cruel mouth that spoke him a man who would carry out anything he began to the bitter end. There would be no mercy for any unfortunate against whom he was enlisted. But Vera wanted him with her in what she was going to undertake, and before she had half told her tale his eyes were glittering with eager greed.

"It shall be well worth your while," she said.

"To defend the right is always worth while, my dear young lady," he said, rubbing his hands. "It will be a privilege, and I trust that nothing will go against you. You must not be too sanguine however, strange obstacles sometimes spring up where everything seems fair and smooth to the eye. There may be some provision about this that you know nothing of."

"There may, but I don't think there is."

"We shall see, we shall see. Let us understand each other. I am to appear at Milverstone in the character of your legal adviser in two days from this time."

"If you please—if you choose—considering what I have told you."

"Meaning that you have no money till you come into what is justly your own."

"Just so. Who ever helps me must do so on speculation; if I fail to establish my right to what is so evidently my own, you will have had your trouble and whatever expense it may be."

"And it will be expensive, such matters cannot be carried on without money."

"You will have all that for nothing, Mr. Shackleton."

"Perhaps not," the lawyer said, "any way I will take my chance. You must leave those papers with me, my dear, they must all be copied."

"My whole future is in your hands," Vera said, placing a bundle of papers on the table. "I am trusting you with a great deal in leaving them."

"When you put yourself into the hands of a doctor or a lawyer it must be wholly or not at all," was the quiet reply. "The documents are as safe with me as with you, I assure you."

He showed Vera to the door and watched her as she walked away, and then he went back to the table and began a minute examination of the papers she had brought.

"A clever girl," he said to himself, when he had finished, "a very clever girl, and I think we shall win. That little head of hers is set on her shoulders the right way."

Esther Morton was more attentive than ever to her young mistress that night. And poor little Nellie wanted attention and sympathy. Something terrible had happened during Esther's absence: Mr. Blennerhasset had been thrown from his horse and kicked on the head in the animal's struggles, and there was a dark rumour afloat in the village that the kindly, good-hearted squire would not live to see the light of another day.

CHAPTER XX.

A CLAIM.

Get wealth and place, if possible with grace—
If not, by any means get wealth and place.

THE news of Mr. Blennerhasset was more reassuring the next morning.

He was not dead nor likely to die, but still the final result of the accident could not be told at present.

Mr. Leicester looked very grave when he came by Nellie's express desire to tell her exactly how the case stood.

She would like to have been with her dear old friend, but they told her it was best not. She should see the squire as soon as it was possible, but till then the fewer people there were about him the better.

Mrs. Deacon was there, strong and helpful, as fretful, opinionated people very often are when any real trouble arises to call forth their better qualities, and Lady Rivers had tendered her services.

But, indeed, there was very little to be done for the poor squire—he lay quite unconscious and knowing no one, but apparently not suffering.

Of course Nellie's wedding must be put off for a little while till it was seen what would be the end of the accident.

There could be no thought of marrying or giving in marriage while the angel of death was hovering so near, and Esther Morton was bidden to put away all the finery and keep only to the fine work, some of which was still unfinished.

"I may not be married for a long time now," poor Nellie said, dolefully, as she aided her maid to fold up the adjuncts to her wedding dress, which had arrived from Paris in all its glory and had been exhibited to a few chosen friends.

"Perhaps not at all," the girl said to herself, with a scornful smile which Nellie did not see. "The fates are in my favour; nothing could have happened better than this accident, that old man was the greatest stumbling block in my path."

Nellie's heart was very heavy as she helped her aunt to write the notes necessary to the wedding guests, it seemed to her as if she was signing the death warrant of her own happiness as she dropped the dainty wax on the envelopes and applied her fanciful little seal to each one.

Lady Rivers laughed at her dread, and told her she was nervous, and no wonder.

"Of course there must be delay, child," she said, "but that will be all. There will be no reason to put off your wedding for long, even if Mr. Blennerhasset is ill. There need not be much further delay, he was not going to give you away, you know."

Nellie sighed; her wedding would not be the same with the kind, genial squire absent from it, and she finished her notes with a very heavy heart.

There was surely some presentiment in her

feeling, some foreshadowing of the awful blow that was about to fall upon her.

It seemed almost as if there had been a death at Milverstone, so heavily had the squire's accident fallen upon the whole household.

The first day passed wearily enough. Neville Delamere came and fetched Nellie to see his uncle towards evening.

She was admitted to the darkened room where he lay and allowed to look at him and kiss the hand that lay outside the bed-clothes.

He might have been asleep so peaceful and quiet was his pale face. There was no sign of any violence about him; the hurts were at the back of the head, and nothing could be done for them at present but keep them cool.

He did not know Nellie or anyone, and all the consolation that Mr. Leicester, who walked home with her and her lover, could offer was that the squire's life was safe, there was no immediate danger, nor did he see any reason why Mr. Blennerhasset should not recover his health entirely in time.

Nellie thought there was something else behind that he did not want her to know, and so indeed there was.

The two physicians who had been summoned express from London had given it as their united opinion that though health might return and the power of speech also, that reason would not—in other words, that the poor gentleman might, and most probably, remain a childish imbecile to the end of his days.

There was no need to tell Nellie this yet, indeed it had not been mentioned beyond the doctors themselves.

But Belton Leicester felt it lie like a heavy weight on his mind as he talked to Miss Rivers, the more so that he held quite a different opinion himself, and had been somewhat contemptuously put down by the great London practitioners.

"We shall have to wait, Neville, dear," Nellie said to Mr. Delamere, as they stood for a moment together before he left her, "we cannot be married while your uncle is ill."

"No, confound it!"

"Neville."

"I did not mean to say that," he said, hastily, and in some sort of contrition. "But it is tantalising, Nellie, when a fellow has made all his arrangements and promised—"

"Well, the promise was to me," Nellie said, quietly, "and if I absolve you from it that will do, won't it?"

"Yes, of course."

He spoke somewhat sulkily, for he had been thinking of a very different promise—one to pay a large sum of money directly after his wedding.

He could not ask his aunt for it, indulgent as she always was to his faults, to call them by no harsher name; she had drained herself so that she could advance him no more, and the squire had set down his foot that not a single penny more than his allowance should ever find its way into the pockets of Neville Delamere again.

"I can help you, Neville."

Nellie was gone to her own room, and he was standing moodily looking out of the window of the little room where Millicent Rivers had discovered him and Nellie together.

A pair of gentle arms were lightly laid round his neck as the words were spoken, and he looked round to see his other love, Vera.

"For Heaven's sake take care," he said, hastily, "that old cat may be about."

"I am not afraid of her."

"I am; she is capable of going and telling Nellie."

"Let her."

"Can't afford it, my handsome darling. And look here, Vera; you are too hard on a fellow. I'm only flesh and blood, you know, and you will drive me to desperation soon, and I shall have to fling up Nellie and Milverstone and go off with you."

"You may fling up Nellie as soon as you like, you shall have Milverstone still."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. It does not belong to her, it never has."

"Whose is it then?"

"Mine."

Neville Delamere sat down on the nearest chair and stared at Vera as if he thought she had suddenly gone mad.

She was calm and cool enough, and repeated her amazing words.

"Milverstone is mine," she said, "that girl has no more right here than she has a right to the name she has gone by till now. I am Miss Rivers and the rightful mistress of this place."

She drew herself up as she spoke with the gesture of a young queen, and he thought how much handsomer she was than her cousin as he looked at her.

Indeed, the beauty of the unprincipled girl was very striking, and even in her black dress and prim little cap she looked far more of the lady than Nellie, who though very pretty had a free-and-easy sort of look about her that, but for her known position, would have put her on a level with farmers' daughters round about her as far as appearances went.

There was no question which was the better face or more worthy to be trusted. Nellie's was all love and gentleness, while Vera, with all her beauty, had something repellent about her. There was a wicked triumph in her eyes as she stood there talking to the man whom she was going to take away from the girl who had befriended her, a tigerish expression that boded badly for the happiness of any one closely connected with her either in business or love.

"Explain, for goodness sake," Neville Delamere said, "and pinch me, will you? or I shall think I am dreaming."

She gave him a slap on the shoulder to wake up his senses, and then began her history.

"I would not have told you to-day," she said, "but that my lawyer will be here to-morrow to make the claim for me, and I shall want some one beside me in possession of their right senses. Every one will go crazy over it for awhile, of course, but it will right itself after awhile."

She went on to tell him that, looking in Nellie's desk—she made no secret of her dishonourable prying into her cousin's affairs—she had found not only her own packet of papers, but some others carefully hidden away, one letter amongst which completely proved Nellie to be an impostor. Her mother had foisted a strange child upon her husband, fearing his anger at the death of her own, and she had been brought up to consider herself the heiress and finally the owner of Milverstone.

"I'll do her this much justice," she said, spitefully, "I don't believe she was aware of it—don't think the queer little hole where I found the things had been opened for an age. It will be news to her."

"News! Good Heavens! Think what it will be to her—that is if it is true," Neville Delamere said. "It will kill her."

"I don't think it will; and it is true. Think what it will be to you and me, Neville, my darling."

She bent forward to him as she spoke, and laid her hands on his shoulders, looking at him with her Delilah eyes till all the little good feeling left in him went to the winds, and he clasped her in his arms and pressed her to his heart with a passion he had never shown to trusting, confiding Nellie, who was even now thinking of him and wondering what she could do to soften the blow the delay of the marriage clearly was to him.

The pair thus communing lip to lip almost did not hear the door softly open and shut, nor see the angry, white face that glared in upon them for a moment and then disappeared. Nellie, in her own room, was startled from her somewhat sad reverie by the abrupt entrance of her aunt, looking as if some dire catastrophe had befallen her.

"Aunt," she gasped, "what is it? What has happened? Are you ill?"

"Come," said Lady Rivers, breathlessly, "come—quick. I told you to beware of that girl, I told you Neville Delamere was not worth any honest girl's love. You shall see for your-

self. Don't look at me that way, I am not mad."

Nellie submitted to be dragged downstairs at a breathless rate, trying to hope that this unaccountable outburst was nothing more than one of her aunt's many fancies.

Alas! This time Lady Rivers had sufficient cause for her indignation. She pushed open the door of the little room silently, and before the two closeted there had had time to spring apart Nellie had seen and guessed all.

She saw her faithless lover's arms round Esther Morton's neck and saw the passionate fire in his false eyes as he looked into hers. With a muttered oath he sprang up as he saw the intruders, and confronted Lady Rivers with anger and shame mingled in his irresolute face.

"You have done well, madame," he hissed, "to bring HER here. Could you have vented your malice on me in any other way?"

"How dare you insult her so!" Lady Rivers said. "Leave the room, you vile hussy, or I will have you turned out by the servants. Go, I say."

But the girl never stirred, she was very pale, but she stood her ground and faced her antagonist like one assured of her position. Lady Rivers poured out upon her head a choice selection of abuse. She was apt to get very vulgar when she was excited.

Nellie said nothing, she seemed stricken dumb. Neville Delamere would have spoken to her and taken her hand, but she shrank from him with loathing unutterable.

"No," she said, faintly, "leave me alone; you have chosen for yourself."

"He had chosen before he had the honour of your acquaintance, madame," Vera said, calmly, but in a voice of scorn. "It is but the renewal of an old acquaintance."

"How dare you speak! How dare you parade your infamy before us in this way! Neville Delamere, if you have any influence with this abandoned creature take her away, don't let her pollute my niece's house any longer."

"I have no right to turn her out, madame."

"Then I will find someone who has."

"Stay, madame," and Vera drew herself up to her fullest height and stayed the angry lady when she would have left the room, "there is no one in this house that has any right to turn me out."

"No right? And why, pray?"

"Because I am its mistress."

CHAPTER XXI.

A TERRIBLE CRISIS.

But now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
Queen o'er myself.

LADY RIVERS and Nellie stared at the speaker as if they doubted the evidence of their senses. Her ladyship, for once, was dumb. She could find no words to express the astonishment and anger which nearly choked her.

"You—you audacious—" she began—and then breaking hopelessly down in the torrent of abuse she had begun she gasped out: "Who are you that you dare to say such a thing?"

"Your cousin, madame—Vera Rivers."

"My cousin—Vera!" exclaimed Nellie, making a step forward. "But we heard you were dead."

"A mistake, madame," Vera said, quietly. "Your wish was father to the thought, doubtless. I was saved by an almost miracle."

"It is a lie! a wicked imposition!" Lady Rivers cried. "Nellie, my dear, come away; we have heard and seen enough. You must get help to have this shameless person turned out of the house. As for you"—and she turned a withering look of scorn on Neville Delamere which made him wince again—"you are not worthy a thought from any honest woman. Nellie is well rid of you and I am thankful she has found you out in time. As you have chosen to elect yourself this woman's protector be good enough to

see her out of this house; she shall not sleep here another night. You are a worthy pair."

"Stop, Lady Rivers," came Vera's clear, calm voice. "Before you speak of turning me out I think you had better reflect. I am no impostor. I am your husband's cousin's daughter. There are plenty of people besides Mr. Delamere here who can prove that much, and I am more than that—I am the rightful owner of Milverstone Grange."

"Oh, she is mad! she is mad!" reiterated her ladyship.

But Nellie spoke more calmly.

"I am less startled now," she said. "It was a surprise to me to find that this gentleman and you were—were—"

She stopped for a moment, for her heart was very full and she was afraid of bursting into tears.

"Were old acquaintances. I daresay you were. The world is made up of surprises, is it not?"

"It is indeed."

"Mr. Neville Delamere is my promised husband. When he asked you to be his wife he had never given me back that promise, and he had left me, his future wife, as I believed myself, without one word of explanation to come here and woo you for your inheritance."

"Hang it all, Vera, stop that."

The words came from Neville Delamere, suddenly and bitterly spoken. He would have slunk out of the room and left the women to settle matters for themselves but that Vera barred his passage by getting between him and the door.

She loved him in her own fierce fashion and she meant to marry him, but she had a mind to sting him too and make him feel what he had done in leaving her.

Nellie was too much stunned by all that was passing to be able to say much. The pain at her heart was very sharp. It is so hard to lose faith all at once in the person you love best in the world and have it set before you in one brief moment that there is neither honour nor loyalty in the idol you have fancied all bright gold.

To make idols and to find them clay,
And to bewail the worship,

is the lot of all women, and poor Nellie was feeling the curse in all its bitterness. It seemed to her as if she must be in some hideous dream from which she should wake up with Neville's arm round her and Neville's voice ringing in her ears as it had often done.

Ah! that could never be again. The Neville of her innocent love was dead and had left in its stead a hideous, shameful creature who sat there ashamed to look at her, ashamed to speak a word in its own defence, a puppet in the hands of the cruel, scornful woman who had proclaimed herself her cousin.

"The truth is better all told at once," Vera said, coldly.

She didn't seem to be in the least disturbed by what was taking place. Her calm was only outward; her heart was beating frightfully under her cold exterior. It had not been any part of her programme that an explanation should come about to-night. Mr. Shackleton would be there on the morrow and she had intended it should all be very calm and dignified. She and Neville had been caught off their guard and they must make the best of it now.

"I have spoken nothing but the simple truth," she said. "I did not intend to have said anything to your ladyship before to-morrow when my man of business will be here to explain what I have asserted. I am sorry that young lady should have had the knowledge thrust upon her, as it has been in self-defence by me, that she has no right here."

"No right here!"

"None whatever, madame. She has no right to the name of Rivers or to the possession of Milverstone."

"How dare you?"

"Gently if you please, your ladyship. The proofs of what I say will be forthcoming to-morrow. I have placed them in my lawyer's hands for safety. They are in Sir Darcie Rivers's

own handwriting and his wife's also. She never had a child to live and she foisted that young lady on her husband as his."

"Oh, no, no!" said poor Nellie; "it is not true. It cannot be. Papa loved me so—and mamma—ah, dear mamma."

The forced calmness broke down now, and Nellie burst into wild, hysterical sobs.

"Don't come near her, don't touch her," said Lady Rivers, scornfully, as Neville Delamere would have lifted her to the sofa. "Ring the bell and be silent before whoever answers it if your craven nature will let you."

It was Wilson who answered the summons, and, with her help, Lady Rivers took Nellie away to her own room to pass from one fainting fit to another, poor child, till they were seriously alarmed.

"Oh, what have they been doing to her, my lady?" asked Wilson, sorely troubled by the condition of her young mistress. "Had she not had trouble enough, poor dear already?"

"They are a pair of devils," replied Lady Rivers, with more energy than refinement. "They have nearly killed them between them. Ring for some hot water, Wilson; I'll try and make her take some brandy. Poor child, poor insulted darling."

Lady Rivers's heart was in the right place after all, though she was capacious and disagreeable. Nellie was in trouble now and her motherly sympathies came out.

"What's Mr. Delamere doing downstairs with her when she's so ill up here?" hazarded Wilson, who was brimming over with curiosity and wonder.

"He's a false, lying scoundrel," her ladyship said, angrily. "Don't mention his name again, Wilson. Never speak of him to your mistress; do you hear? It will only make her ill again."

"I won't, my lady."

"Nor to anyone. Don't speak of what has happened to-night, there's a good girl. Your mistress is in great trouble and it will make it worse for her if it is tattered about in the servants' hall and the housekeeper's room."

Wilson promised and kept her word, but that there was something unusual going on was patent to all the servants. A man was despatched to Mr. Deacon with a request that he would come to the Grange directly, and another sent to the station with a telegram to the family lawyer and Sir Wilfred Rivers, asking them both to be at Milverstone as soon as possible the next day. The message to the lawyer contained an odd sentence that the man who took it puzzled over not a little but could make nothing of.

"A Mr. Shackleton, a lawyer, is coming here to-morrow to make a curious claim. Meet him for Miss Rivers."

Who was Mr. Shackleton? the servants all wondered, and what claim was he coming to make? Queer things were happening. Miss Nellie was in her own room very ill. Mr. Delamere had slunk out of the house like a whipped dog, so some one who saw his departure declared, and the comparison was not inapt. And Esther Morton was giving herself airs.

There was no mistake about that part of the wondering. She had been insolent to the housekeeper and snappish to one or two of the servants who had to speak to her. There was evidently something on her mind that boded unpleasantness for some one.

Lady Rivers had got the name of the lawyer from Vera herself. Her good sense told her all that should be done at once, and she had done it. If any such absurd claim was going to be made, and the young woman had really gone the length of making any lawyer her confidant, it was as well that he should be met by Nellie's own legal adviser, a man who knew all about the affairs of the estate, and would doubtless be able to tell something about this mysterious letter which Vera, if she really was Vera and not an impostor, claimed to have found.

She found that Neville Delamere had had the grace to slink away when she went in search of Vera, and she was alone in her room silent and watchful of what might happen next.

"Your ladyship has thought better of turning

me out of the house then," she said, scornfully, when she saw who wanted her. "It would have been bad policy, believe me."

"I am not going to discuss the matter with you," Lady Rivers replied. "I only want the name of your lawyer that my husband and Miss Rivers's man of business may meet him."

"You may bring all the world to meet him if you like. I have no cause to be afraid."

"I should think you have every cause when you became possessed of the papers you speak of by theft—it was nothing else."

"The end justifies the means sometimes. I found them by accident where they had lain for years untouched."

"It was no accident which took you to the desk."

"No. It was to look for my own property. If my late uncle had not been so careful in endorsing his papers the packet would not have attracted me."

"And they were letters you say?"

"Yes, containing a full and complete confession of the fraud practised by Sir Darcie's wife, and his connivance at it. The letters are very old, some twelve or fourteen years now, but they are none the less precious. Lady Rivers, I think you know something about them."

The girl's quick eyes had detected a change that had come over the face of the listening lady, a look of fear. She did remember something about a letter about the time that she spoke of that was said to have troubled Sir Darcie very much, and remembered his saying to her husband when visiting their house, which he had done at intervals, that he had been sorely troubled by the duplicity of some one whom he loved.

She was sure she remembered something of this sort. Her husband would perhaps know the contents of the letter if it was that to which the baronet had alluded.

"If you are not afraid of publicity you shall have plenty of it," she said to Vera. "If you are not deceiving everybody, you must be acting under a delusion."

"I am not, and you know it. I saw that you knew something by your face."

"You are mistaken, I know nothing, but I have no doubt my husband does, and there will be many others who do I have no doubt. Sir Darcie was not a specially reticent man, and he made a confidant of his lawyer I know."

"I have no fear, madame," Vera said, telling a direct falsehood in making the assertion, for she was afraid—horribly so. It was such a chance that they should believe her assertion or take the evidence of the letters at this distance of time. She felt almost inclined to run away out into the night, anywhere rather than face the inquiries she had herself set about. No, she would trust Mr. Shackleton, he had said her cause was good, and he was not a man to take up anything that he did not see his way to carrying through. She would go on, but she must have something to make her sleep, she had not slept for two nights, and she had provided herself with something while she was in town.

She took a little bottle from her pocket and dropped some of its contents on a lump of sugar before she went to bed and earned for herself an uninterrupted night's rest, while the remainder of the inmates of the Grange were for the most part tossing on their pillows in sleepless excitement, wondering what the morrow would bring forth.

(To be Continued.)

A RECENTLY patented compound for flavouring cigars consists of rum, alcohol, oil of apple, tonka bean, valerian root, and laudanum.

EACH reel of paper on which the London morning papers are printed is, on an average, forty-six inches wide and three and a-half miles in length. The combined issues of the "Times," "Telegraph," "Standard," and "Daily News," if placed end to end, would form a continuous line of 600 miles, or about the distance from London to Berlin. What is the amount at a penny a line?

FACETIÆ.

DEFINITIVE.

BOARD SCHOOLMASTER (desiring to explain the word "Conceited," which has occurred in course of the reading lesson): "Now, boys, suppose that I was always boasting of my learning—that I knew a good deal o' Latin for instance, or that my personal appearance was—that I was very good-looking, y' know—what should you say I was?"

STRAIGHTFORWARD BOY (who has "caught the speaker's eye"), "I sh' say you was a liar, sir!"

FOR DR. BIRCH'S YOUNG FRIENDS.

LAST week, "The Guardian" informs us, the Marchioness Conyngham laid the foundation-stone of the Smack Boys' Home at Ramsgate. Now then, Sir William, here's a place for your juvenile offenders.

REGENT STREET NIGHT WATCH.—Not the "C Division"—the "Won't See Division."

LORD SHERBROOKE.

Now raised so high he tries to show
He quite forgets he e'er was Lowe.

MEM. FOR MOTHERS.—A weakly child should be brought up by a monthly nurse.

ENGLISH HISTORY.

"And who was the king who had so many wives?"

A SONG FOR THE SEASON.

AIR: "The Woodpecker Tapping."
I knew by the smoke that so sootily
curled

Above the red roof that a chimney
was near;
And I said if Asphyxia's found in this
world,

The chest that's asthmatic might
look for it here.

Not a yard could I see, not a sight
met mine eye

But the soot-flakelets falling like
showers from the sky.

Then I said, "Were such foul-belching
chimneys as this—

As they ought to be—made to con-
sume their own smoke,

Even winter in town were comparative
bliss,

One could keep clean shirt-collars, nor
constantly choke.

Not a yard could I see, not a sight
met mine eye

But the soot-flakelets falling like
showers from the sky.

VERY NATURAL.

At the "Fog and Smoke" Conference last week some most important remarks were made by Mr. Coles. Coles ought to know something about it. He, of course, suggested grate improvements.

BRIGHTON PIER, NOVEMBER.

WIFE: "Charles, dear, suppose we go back to the hotel; the wind blows so hard here I'm obliged to keep my mouth shut."

[Charles mentally resolves to bottle some of that wind, and take it back to town with him.]

O'CELLO.—Mr. Toole says that a Jew musician is a violin fiddle (a vile infidel).

LIGHT TIMBER.—Sunbeams. Moonshine.

BROWN does not believe in cheap markets. For instance, he says he would sooner a person toss him for half-a-crown than have the same operation performed by a bull for nothing.

A CHRISTMAS HAMPER.—Scarcity of money.

THERE is not the slightest truth in the rumour that the Stock Exchange Committee have appointed a day for settling the Irish question.

Moonshine.

SAYS a daily paper: "Mr. Gladstone enjoys the best of health, and has a wonderfully sharp appetite." This is the reason he is so fond of a chop off his axe.

Moonshine.

ANOTHER LITTLE "TRUTHFUL" STORY.

MAMMA: "My dear child, whatever's the matter? Why, you are quite pale."

JOHNNY (who has made too close an acquaintance with a hot poker): "Pale! Not at all, mamma; on the contrary, I'm a little son burnt."

Judy.

ALL SWELL THAT ENDS SWELL.—The only thing to which a "swell" is of any use is an organ.

Fun.

"MERE" TRIFLING.—Drifting on a lake.

Fun.

WHAT IS IT RARELY "SERVES YOU" "RIGHT"? —A lawn tennis ball.

Fun.

MAKE NO ERROR!

IRATE SCOTCH LAWYER (to future Solicitor-General): "Now, sir, look at this, sir! Six mistakes on the first page of this deed, sir! What use is this to anyone, sir? What use, I say, sir?"

F.S.G.: "What use—what—" (Hopefully) "We might make a Writ o' Error o't, sir."

Fun.

AN INSTRUMENTAL MUSICAL BOY.—"Tom-Tom," the piper's son.

Fun.

"PROG"—NOTIFICATIONS. — Prophecies about our food supply.

Funny Folks.

HINTS TO POETS.

THE best way to ensure your poems being really sparkling, brilliant, and full of fire is to—burn 'em.

Funny Folks.

QUITE AN OVA—"SIGHT."—A magnificent show of "new laid 'uns."

Funny Folks.

CAPITAL TON OF COALS, THAT!

MISTRESS (to Eliza, who has announced that the men who brought the coals want beer money): "I suppose they've brought the proper quantity, Eliza? You counted the sacks carefully?"

ELIZA (hesitating): "Ye-es, m'm."

MISTRESS: "And how many were there to the ton?"

ELIZA (with a bold jump at it): "Seven-teen."

Funny Folks.

HAIRDRESSING IN EXCEL-SIS.

THE annual comb-petition of the big-wigs of the Holborn Town Hall the other day was a source of veritable capillary attraction. The hairdressers who had elected to go to the poll were already in their places when the ladies who had consented to be op-hair-rated upon arrived, accompanied by their gallant chevelures.

Soon the erection of wonderful coiffures waxed fast and (coif)ure-ious, and there was observed the performance of more than one extraordinary feat on the head; as those accomplished skull-piters and poll-ificians proceeded with their filament labours, and built their seductive castles in the hair, their fancies became worthy of being handed down as hair-looks to posterity. The sight was a noble one, and all present regretted when at last there came that which is always incidental to hair—the inevitable parting.

Funny Folks.

"HE PINES—IN THOUGHT."

DOBSON: "Curious thing. I have pineries, yet all my friends get better pines than I do."

BLOBSON: "Not curious at all. I suppose your gardeners find your friends their best customers."

Funny Folks.

EXTRAORDINARY AERIAL PHENOMENON.—"A flight of steps."

Funny Folks.

A NEW "SQUARING-THE-CIRCLE" POSER.

TIMON TOMPKINS asks, "If it's 'Love that makes the world go round,' what would make it turn square?"

Funny Folks.

ZILLAH THE GIPSY;

OR,

LOVE'S CAPTIVE.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OUT OF HIS SPHERE.

As monkeys at a mirror stand amazed
They fail to find what they so plainly see;
Thus men in shining riches see the face
Of happiness, nor know it is a shade.

THYRA was not the sort of woman to throw a chance away, and Red Reuben, spite of his promise and repentance, was kept very nearly a prisoner in her cottage. He was a dangerous, weak-headed old man, evidently apt to do reckless things on an impulse—one who would be very much better out of the way, but who could not be got rid of without the danger of suspicion alighting in their direction.

It was pleasant for Reuben to be fed well and comfortably housed under much the same conditions as an aged dog, and perhaps if Michael had kept out of his reach he might have forgotten to strain at the chain; but one night late in the autumn, when the wind was whistling down the chimney and howling dismally, and the old elms on the heath were bending beneath its fury, he was startled out of his quiescent state by a vision of Michael alighting from a Hansom cab and smoking a preternaturally long cigar.

Thyra, who had evidently been expecting him and had been restless and uneasy since early that morning, when Michael sent her a message, ran to the door to welcome him, and as he entered and flung himself on one of the chairs she could see he was unusually excited.

"Well," she cried, breathlessly, "what news, my son? Is it over at last?"

Red Reuben, who hated and dreaded him from past experience, had crept into a little room at the back, but he could tell his voice was raised above its normal pitch, and he was so eager to hear the news he had brought that he knelt down and listened with his ear at the key-hole.

"Hurrah, hurrah, I've won the case," said Michael, flinging his hat in the air, crossing his legs and throwing down a pile of bank notes on the table. "They gave their verdict this morning, and after feathering their own nest pretty well with costs and heaps of speechifying and all the rest of it the verdict was given in my favour. The people cheered till they were hoarse. We didn't retain Sir Thomson Tomkins at five hundred a day for nothing."

"The villain," muttered Red Reuben, "and he's no more the prince's legitimate son than I am."

Thyra, pale as death, hung over Michael, gazing at him almost vacantly from surprise and joy.

"They wound me up like a clock and frightened me out of my life with their cross-examination," she said, with a cunning comprehensive glance around, "but that Lady Alesia's a cool hand and no mistake—they couldn't shake her evidence. You'll have to keep to your part of the bargain, my son, and pay up fair."

Michael laughed, playing with some heavy seals on his chair.

"Lord! I'm a big swell now and no mistake," he cried, "it's hats off all round I can tell you. Life is a capital practical joke when one's rich. You should have heard Sir Thomson Tomkins's pathetic speech about you—the poor and honest girl tempted to her own destruction—the working of late remorse and repentance in the prince's heart—the struggle between duty and inclination; and our witnesses were plucky over it too, there wasn't a dry eye in court after our man spoke. I wish I could remember half."

"And it's all through me," muttered Red Reuben, meditatively, "it's that forged certificate that's worked the trick for him."

"And Zillah, was she there?" Thyra next asked under her breath, scrutinising his face.

"Of course, and cool and 'orty as could be, but she can do us no more harm. I believe that fellow Clydale's so crazed about her they'll run away together one of these days. He looked that pleading at her I could have strangled him."

"It's wonderful," said Thyra, meditatively, "that our plot's ended well; it would not have had a chance though but for the help of others. Lady Alesia's backed you up all through; there's only one thing I dread, Michael, and that is the dreadful deed of firing the theatre may be discovered and laid at your door. Are those men to be trusted?"

"What? you're showing the white feather," he cried, with an oath. "You're trembling like a reed. I've told you I paid 'em well. They were once convicts, obliged to content themselves with hard labour and a pound of bread a day, and now they're all set up nice as can be, with pretty little public-houses in Kent, with orchards and bowling-greens and they're doing a roaring trade. What do they want to blab for? They've had a taste o' the crank once, and the livery, and the religious literature of the chaplain, as didn't agree with them. Why, they're in clover."

Thyra was silent a minute, and then she said, in a low voice:

"And the duchess, was she able to be in court?"

"Yes, and looking like death itself. You couldn't hear a word she said. They had to take it all down in writing."

"Michael, Michael, why did you do the dreadful deed?" she cried, pacing up and down the room. "Why did you fire the theatre?"

"Drink killed my conscience," he answered, gloomily, "and she set me on, the dainty aristocrat, Lady Alesia, but the sin fell on her own head. It's her child that suffered—Zillah escaped."

"Ay, as she always shall," muttered Reuben, the other side of the door. "Let him boast a little while longer. Justice shall yet be on his track."

"Have you any brandy?" Michael asked, rising to his feet, "because I'll have some. There's much for me to do and see. First I shall take possession of Rosendale Hall and have it put in repair. This afternoon I'm off to Tattersall's to buy a pair of fine carriage horses. I think I know how to play the gentleman and swell; and then some men have asked me to supper to-night to meet a few actresses from the Variétés who are anxious to make my acquaintance. But I don't mean to let the women ruin me."

His jests were more brutal and terrible than his threats. Success had maddened him, he would plunge into every excess, every riot, and infamous pleasure with the wild daring of the "beggars on horseback."

"And who knows where I shall end?" he went on, excitedly. "Marry a lord's daughter, perhaps, and go into Parliament. Why not? I must work up my grammar a bit and learn a little of everything. Begin life without shoes and only oatmeal porridge for dinner, and end by having bishops bowing to you in your barouche; that's what the wheel of fortune brings one. The jade favours the brave. There was that French fellow won just as I'm doing by what they call a coup d'état—but our barricade was the work of a little Jew thief."

Reuben heard him and grinned. He had always hated Michael for his bullying, brow-beating ways and for having nearly brained him in one of his rages with a pair of silver snuff-boxes.

"Give him rope enough and he'll hang himself," muttered Reuben. "If not I'll be his executioner."

But, dreading both Michael and Thyra, he threw himself on the bed and feigned slumber. He knew his life would not be worth an hour's purchase were they to suspect him capable of ruining them.

And, perhaps, had it not been for witnessing the awful scene of the burning theatre and

Zillah so nearly sacrificed, Red Reuben would have kept faith with the gipsies to the end. What strange and often marvellous anomalies, contradictions, and miscarriages of justice one finds running through human laws and verdicts. Are not the innocent sometimes condemned to death and hung on the evidence, oaths, and testimony of false witnesses?

Who can defeat the williness of a clever and unscrupulous woman? who can crush the eloquence of a Sir Thomson Tomkins retained at the trifling fee of five hundred a-day? After interminable months of patient examination devoted to the Tichborne trial, after sifting, searching, and making every possible inquiry and analysis after truth, thousands of Englishmen doubted if the verdict returned was sound and just. The labyrinth of facts and testimony is often so tangled and confused, truth is so often disguised, that few things can be proved to universal satisfaction and beyond a doubt. Evil in Michael's case carried the day—he had won so far—he was deemed the inheritor of vast possessions. Weeks and weeks had been devoted to the case and this was the end. He was pronounced Prince Anatole's legitimate son and heir.

As for what society and the clubs were likely to say on such a delicate matter it might be curious and amusing to a student of modern life and manners to find out. In an age when Americanism is an institution plenty would be found ready to pat Michael on the back and think him a splendid fellow—a little rough, like a fine unpolished diamond, but well worth the cutting and setting that would be bestowed upon him in ultimately polishing him for society and his place in the world. Young ladies who had read "Lara" and "The Corsair" would think him quite a Byronic hero, and forgive him his awkwardness in mangling their toes or tearing their trains in the mazes of the giddy dance. For what will not a fine income effect? Gossip, libel and scandal can be muzzled if the tiresome chatter-boxes are invited to good dinners, and even Charity, holy nymph as she is, will not strain her eyes too far if handsome cheques head her lists of subscribers.

Meanwhile Red Reuben feigned slumber, and Michael, opening the creaking door suddenly, looked in on him with anything but an affectionate gaze.

"Why, it's the little rat I thought was trapped and dead long since," muttered Michael, staring at the sleeper. "What is he doing here?"

Red Reuben opened one eye something like a dozing old dog aware of an unamiable Tabby's proximity and shrinking from a sudden pounce. "He's keeping me company, dear," said Thyra, soothingly. "He's very fond of me you know, but it behoves us to beware of him."

"Well, if he pleases you, and he comes none of his nonsense, it's all right, I suppose, eh? But what do you mean by bewaring of him? I do sometimes think—"

Reuben here opened both eyes and blinked hard, as if the remembrance of that attack from the silver snuff-boxes was too much for his peace of mind, but he closed his eyelids before they noticed him.

"Why, that he'd be better out of the way. So long as he lives I'm never safe. I think I'll wake him for a chat."

Michael approached Red Reuben and aroused him with a rough push on the shoulders. Gilded wickedness and gilded triumphs were all before him, but here was an instrument who might put a spoke in the wheel of the golden car and upset it altogether—this little miserable, half-crazed Jew whom Michael believed hated him. Had he not stood between Zillah and the gipsies' wrath, and brought her food when they had half starved her to death?

While Reuben lived Michael could never feel himself out of danger. It could surely not be for long that these withered, trembling limbs could be sustained with life.

Reuben, thus aroused, opened his aged eyes wide and saw what the French call a "beau jeune homme" standing by his side, radiant in the newest of clothes, the finest of linen, and

heavy gold seals on his chain that jingled pleasantly.

"Why—is it Michael?" cried Red Reuben, passing his hand over his eyes.

"Why isn't it?" answered the other. "Look again, my friend, and say if I'm not improved for the better."

Reuben sprang out of bed and surveyed Michael from top to toe.

"I'd pass anywhere for a gent now, wouldn't I?" he asked, laughing.

"Except in heaven," said Reuben, drily. "I fancy, Michael, if they watched the case above, they'd say you were an out-an'-out villain."

"Oh, you're coming the moral lecture business, are you?" sneered Michael. "I was going to provide comfortably for all your wants, Reuben. What do you say to a 'pub' too? It's a pretty business and a profitable one. I'm not one as forgets old friends."

The Jew looked at him under his dark, shifting brows.

"So you've squared it with them. I saw Tinker looking quite respectable the other day, sitting in a gig and driving through Holborn. Who wouldn't serve you and take your wages?"

He said it softly to himself, but his thoughts were far away.

"Blest if he ain't growing soft," muttered Michael, as Reuben drew a long breath, "and when they're soft they're more dangerous than before. He'll go whining about repentance and peach to the police."

To lock this unpleasant person up in a private lunatic asylum would be the wisest policy, money will do almost anything, and two or three snug retreats for objectionable relations were, Michael knew, in existence.

Then, after a few brief remarks, he lost his temper, drank more brandy, raved, swore, and at last flew at the wretched old man and endeavoured to "knock him silly."

He dared not murder him outright, but he did his best to leave him daft and senseless.

"I know your game," he roared, kicking the nearly lifeless body on to the hearth-stone, "but we'll drop you in the river sooner than give you time to ruin us."

Reuben groaned; the blood trickled down his face, he felt on the point of death, but his hatred of Michael gave him strength for one final effort of speech.

"You are a murderer and a thief," he whispered, "you fired the theatre, and you've taken the girl's lands and gold—the girl who is your sister."

"Gammon of my sister, I'll let you know what I'll do," yelled Michael.

Goaded to madness he knelt down and pressed his powerful knees on Reuben's chest, and with his strong hands and knuckles about his throat endeavoured to strangle him, but Thyra, with a fierce cry, flung herself on Michael and tore him off and begged him to leave Reuben to her, he should do them no harm.

Reuben, after this last attack, fainted outright, and they then agreed that he should be put quietly out of the way under safe espionage—Thyra watching his actions in the meanwhile; and after some more conversation relative to their affairs had taken place Michael walked out of the cottage, beckoned to the cabman to draw up to the path, sprang in, and was driven fleetly back to London.

A deep, passionate glow lit his eyes with sombre, sullen fire.

He was glad to forget the shadow hanging over him of Reuben's hatred and remember for a time the bright side only of the picture.

There was little Count Valdemire and his friend the Honourable Maude Glasher, who had both made appointments to meet him for a luncheon at the Café de l'Europe. The count promised to "show him life," while the suppet to which he had been invited was given by the Honourable Maude, who had a penchant for high play at cards, and fancied Michael might prove a pigeon worth plucking.

She was one of the most celebrated actresses at the Variétés, and was sure to be surrounded by a troop of convivial friends.

She drove a high-stepping pair of horses in the park, was considered "quite the best thing out" that season, and her bright wit and charming merriment soon cured Michael of his temporary depression of spirits.

Michael grew reckless in his expenditure, a lurking dread that something might eventually happen to dispossess him of all made him careless and extravagant to the last degree, and the fair Maude went home after her luncheon the richer for a fine sealakin dolman and a pair of diamond ear-rings.

That night at supper the count and others were artful enough to pretend merely to drink fairly, but in reality plied Michael with wine while keeping their heads cool and clear.

Some painful absent-mindedness on his part made him lose heavily at cards, and he found festive society somewhat expensive, for he had barely enough left in his pocket to pay the cabman who drove him to his hotel in the Hay-market.

"But they tell me they mean to float me among the swells, but that I'm not fairly broke in yet for 'high life,'" he muttered, rolling up the stairs, and, forgetting the number of his room, tumbled into the sacred sanctuary of a timid virgin of fifty summers in orange-coloured curl-papers, who received him with a shriek, and sent Michael, stammering apologies, out of the room.

For a few days he plunged so deeply into dissipation that he forgot the plan he had in his head with regard to Reuben, whose hatred hung over him like a very sword of Damocles.

The path might be rose-strewn and gay, but there were dangers and entanglements still—the enemy were about to move for a new trial, and with that who could tell what might arise?

"If it's a short life it shall be a merry one," he muttered, smoking a cigar, and then, turning away, linked his arm familiarly in the count's, who was anxious to sell him one of his racehorses that threatened to turn out a "screw," and at the same time get him to be kind enough to put his name to a little bill.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"IT IS THE END."

And thy commendment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain
Unmoulded with baser matter.

For a long time Madeline's life was despaired of, but, contrary to all expectation, she rallied sufficiently to be able to be taken to Brighton towards the end of October, the air of which watering-place had been strongly recommended.

Lady Alesia accompanied her and devoted herself entirely to the work of nursing her. Some days she was wonderfully better, at others it seemed as if a breath of air must extinguish the flickering life.

The excitement of the trial had produced a very bad effect on the invalid's nerves—she had been face to face with Zillah and the emotion of the meeting had brought back all the duchess's worst symptoms.

During this month of November, when the waves gently rippled along the shore, and a few shafts of sunshine fell on the beach and lit up the pier so that it lost its former haziness through the autumnal mists, Madeline was lying on her couch, drawn as usual before the half-opened window of her apartments, turning over the leaves of a new novel from the circulating library.

She was fearfully changed. The ravages of the fire were perfectly visible. Her complexion was scarred, and she bore a death-like whiteness; in fact her whole appearance was too ethereal to give much hope of her ultimate restoration to health. But shattered and maimed as she was, a deeper meaning than physical suffering was revealed of late in her ill-concealed sighs. The destruction of her vigour and beauty which had so suddenly come upon her in the hey-day of her triumph had not been so fatal as the revelation of the duke's love for another, and that other her cousin Zillah.

"Do you think you are gaining strength here," Lady Alesia was saying, bending over the girl, "and will be well enough to pass Christmas at Clydale?"

She ever assumed a cheerfulness of manner very foreign to her real feelings. If Madeline but recovered all would be well. The trial had ended in Michael's favour; the dark crime of the fire still remained undiscovered. Zillah was about to leave England for good, however much her friends desired her to move for another judgment, and the duke, miserable and dissatisfied as he appeared, was too much a man of honour and also she believed too much a man of pleasure to ever disturb his domestic arrangements by any erratic proceedings that must hurl him to his own destruction.

Lord Carden too, for many years a devoted admirer, had been so moved with admiration of her devotion and care of the duchess that he had proposed. Hence she was more than convinced that her powers of charming had not failed her since she had entered the forties, a source of considerable satisfaction to many fair widows seeking whom they may devour.

She was a very heartless and selfish woman, and spite of her awakened remorse and pain she had grown ever so little weary of her incessant attention on her daughter. The duke too was not always as polite as he might be, and her position had its disadvantages. Perhaps the sick girl understood all this and scarcely cared to battle for life with her ruined beauty and her broken heart. So when Lady Alesia spoke about returning to Clydale for Christmas Madeline shivered, recollecting that past Christmas when all had been so bright and she the cynosure of every eye.

"I do not care to see Clydale again," she said, wearily, her eyes fixed on the white sails of a distant ship, breasting the waves.

"If you will not make any effort," cried Lady Alesia, shrugging her shoulders, "we can do nothing, it all rests with yourself."

"Mother, don't be cruel," said Madeline, gravely. "Bear with me to the end; it will not be for long."

"Cruel, my angel," patting Madeline's hand affectionately and kneeling by her side. "What ideas you get in your little head."

"Heaven is my witness that I suffer," answered the duchess. "The sorrow and the dread, however, are passing. I have often wished to ask you one thing, mother, but I've not had the strength yet. Were you innocent of all knowledge of that fire?" She gripped Lady Alesia's hand and wrung it. "Sometimes a fear haunts me that you knew—"

"Madeline, are you mad? I—"

But she dared not meet her daughter's eyes. She fancied the same reproach might linger in them as on the night when she was brought home insensible to awake to the tortures of a martyr.

"I believe you, mother," she said, simply, and again Lady Alesia felt that strange writhing movement of her hands. "So that is ended. But since I've been lying here and thinking hour after hour a wish has come to me to see Zillah once more. Do you think she would come to me if I asked her?"

Lady Alesia bit her lip in sudden rage. She detested all idea of a meeting between them, and Madeline, slavishly submissive to every wish of the tyrant who had ruled her from childhood with an iron hand and moulded her impulses as she pleased, did not repeat her question—she saw that it was displeasing to her mother.

Then some friends of Lady Alesia were announced. Their barouche was waiting at the door. They came to beg her ladyship, who had become immensely popular since her engagement to Lord Carden, to go with them for a drive, and Madeline, glad to be alone, urged her to accept their offer.

"Good bye, my sweet girl," she said, tripping away to dress for her drive. "I think I shall wear my velvet and sables. The afternoons are chilly. Try and have a little sleep."

"She is a wicked woman," muttered the duchess, as the door closed. "But now gay,

how light-hearted she is. She would rather die than be out of the fashion. She does not care where or when she strikes, and I have ever been a puppet in her hands."

Spite of herself the tears came. She turned her head away from that view of the sea, and again took up her book and tried to read.

Then she threw it aside and clasped her hands.

"I will ask Bertram," she murmured. "He is kind and gentle. He could not refuse my last wish."

The door opened and the duke entered. He was glad to find his wife alone. He never treated her with harshness, caprice, or tyranny, as was the way with Lady Alesia. She beckoned him to her side.

He bent over her and caressed her with more than his usual kindness, and she clung to him for a moment and put her arms round him.

"Bertram, I've a strange fancy, but you can gratify it. I wish to see Zillah."

He started, and then laid his hand on her brow, which throbbled beneath his touch.

She was looking at him earnestly and entreatingly, and still he had not answered.

"You will do what your wife asks, Bertram, will you not? Some day you will know how I have loved you, even if—"

She burst into a flood of tears.

"Hush, darling! Do not excite yourself thus."

"You will soon lose me. I want to make up for the wrong done to you and her. I know that you love her."

He caressed her with a gesture and was silent.

"I saw how you looked at her that day in the court. Why should you not be happy? Bring her to me now."

"Do you really mean it?"

"I do. I am dying daily. Soon I shall be too weak to speak, and if you cannot love me I wish you to remember at least one thing about me that will make my memory less painful."

He rose to his feet, and took a few hurried turns across the room, and then when a few more whispered entreaties had passed the white lips he promised he would go in search of Zillah and bring her to Madeline's side.

After the duke had left her, on the night when he rescued her from death, Zillah remained in a stunned, trance-like state for hours, and to attempt to sleep in such a condition was impossible, and yet both her bodily and mental powers required rest.

She was suffering from complete prostration of the nervous system, and the next day found her reduced to that state of miserable weakness when the slightest sound jars on the brain and the patient turns from all forms of nourishment. And then, spite of her fame and the numerous lists of her acquaintances, she was alone in the world as far as individual affection or friendship went.

It was a hired nurse who sat by her bed-side in the long night hours when, as the weeks glided on, Zillah's health utterly broke down, and the doctors declared that brain fever was imminent.

They pronounced their belief that Zillah's mind for months had been racked with some form of grief, which had been too distressing in its effects to be long borne without some disease of the brain setting in. The excitement produced by the fire at the theatre had brought on a crisis, and great care, quietness and good nursing were needed to restore her to health. Sleeplessness was the most fatal sign of the malady. The worst forms of the delirium had expended themselves in the wild excesses and convulsions of over-wrought nature, but rest she could not gain.

Inquiries and calls were endless at her hotel, her illness formed one of the topics of the day; it came in due time to the duke's ears, whose anxiety and pain again destroyed the hard-learned resignation he had tried to acquire in accepting a life-long absence from Zillah.

In sickness we learn how dear the absent one



[PARDONED.]

is—how cruel is existence passed apart! The one enthusiastic, animating principle of our faith, which supports vitality in thousands of souls, is the hope that those who are dead and whom we would have come from the most distant corner of the world to embrace will meet us again, for absence increases our longing to behold them and vivifies every form of true and tender love.

Banished by her firm will he dared not approach her again, he could only wait and hear the result, so he bore his misery as such men do, with silent gloom and cold reserve.

But now bidden by Madeline to seek Zillah he was making his way to her hotel with feelings more of sadness than of fond expectation. He walked like a man in a dream, and his mind, which before had felt in harmony with nothing save a great despair, seemed all aglow with confused images. How would she receive him coming on such an errand? She was no longer the simple, thoughtful, uncultivated girl satisfied with flowers and music and obscurity, standing on the threshold of a new life, but the successful and courted artiste, full of exquisite refinement and sufficiently cultivated to appreciate what before had been a mere absorption.

He ascertained that Zillah was so far recovered as to be able to receive guests, but that in a few days she had made preparations to leave England.

He sent up his card and with it a note briefly explaining his errand. Zillah was alone when these were brought her, and her pale face flushed as she waited for his approach.

"I have come from your cousin," he said, quietly, "she wishes to see you at once."

In a dim, undefined way a consciousness of the truth flashed upon Zillah. She had ceased to care about the injustice of human judgments and the falsehoods that had been ingeniously woven by cruel, cunning tongues, and which had disinherited her and pronounced her nameless, but she did care that Lady Alesia should be baffled by the dying declarations of her daughter, for whom all interest in earthly things was nearly over.

"Will you come?" he asked. Her reserve pained him, though it revealed her proud and delicate refinement in a perfect light.

"I have forgiven her," she said. "What more is there to be said?"

"She wishes in some way to atone. She has taken your name and place, and now that it must be lost and resigned—now that death is near—I think she is frightened. I have listened to her passionate sobs, her late remorse, but she is not so much to blame as the woman who ever governed her weak will—she who drove you from your home in childhood."

"I will come," said Zillah, quickly, "since it is her wish," and she left the room to prepare for her journey. They spoke very little after this, each occupied with thoughts too deep and sad for speech.

It was late in the evening when they arrived, and Madeline was still alone. She had been moved from the window, and was lying quietly in the darkness, which she preferred to the glare of gas or candles. She had no idea that her pulse was gradually growing fainter and feebler. She was always weak and languid now, but excitement lent her temporary, fictitious strength. With her fading life her mind had grown clearer and calm of late. Sin wore another aspect. A horror pervaded her as she considered the false position she had assumed. She wished to do Zillah justice at last—a contempt of corruption and deceit aroused her slumbering faculties for one supreme effort.

For some minutes she had remained in a species of stupor, and on hearing footsteps in the room her eyes opened as if aroused from a gloomy dream, and then a form bent over her, and she knew the duke had returned.

A feeling of terror and surprise agitated her. Her heart beat dangerously fast.

"All alone?" he said, touching her arm, "and in darkness? Let me order—"

"No, Bertram, no light. Please reverse the blinds. The moon is shining over the sea. It is sufficient for me to feel you near me. And now where is Zillah?"

Zillah advanced and came closer to her cousin's side. They had never spoken to each other since their childhood.

"It is kind of you, Zillah, to have come to me," the duchess said, speaking low and with evident effort. "You see I am very ill. I cannot live long."

Zillah lifted her hands to her brow. The words implied so much. If the suspicions of Mathias were correct, and Lady Alesia and Michael had both been criminally involved in that fire, how terrible the result for Madeline.

"I am sorry for your suffering," she said, in a low, pained voice, but Madeline held her hands and strained her to her with the last remnant of her feeble strength.

"Zillah, Zillah," she murmured, "this is the end. I cannot die with a falsehood on my lips. You are Prince Anatole's lawful daughter, her sole heiress."

"Great heavens! then it is true?" muttered the duke, and through the dim light he saw new softness in Zillah's eyes and tears upon her cheeks.

"Yes, Madeline, I know all—it must have been proved soon."

There was a terrible silence, but at last Madeline spoke again.

"I want you to forgive me, Zillah. My mother ruled me at her wicked will. She stifled all my best feelings, and Bertram was all the world to me, but," turning to the duke and resting his hand on Zillah's, "he loves you, Zillah; he always has. He will give you life."

More effort was beyond her strength. Insensibility gradually stole over her, and for a long time all restoratives were unavailing. She spoke but little after, and seemed barely conscious of anything.

Towards dawn her breathing grew feebler, and her pulse fainter, and as the pearly flecks of light grew clearer and the morning tide was ebbing fast, she sank into the dreamless slumber of death.

(To be Continued.)



[A FEW SUGGESTIONS.]

RESCUED FROM RUIN. (A COMPLETE STORY).

CHAPTER I.

"MADGE, my love, it is no use—none—none. You will work your fingers to the bone, you will kill yourself with hammering sense and even the very rudiments of learning into the thick skulls of brainless children. And yet we shall starve—starve in hopeless struggles," ejaculated Mr. Proctor, with a despairing bitterness that spoke of a galled, suffering spirit that could endure no more of the world's trials.

He was a thin, withered individual who spoke thus, one who bore the marks at once of gentleness and of intellect in his withered features.

And it was justified by the reality of his past history.

He had been a highly educated man, destined for the bar, and if he had worked hard and steadily he might well have succeeded in his profession.

But his eccentric literary tastes and his utter repugnance to any species of constraint were fatal to his prospects.

His sweet and gentle wife was too submissive and reverential to venture to find any fault with aught he said or did, and failed in the timid efforts she made to induce him to keep more steadily to the calling that was their chief means of livelihood, and as their limited fortune diminished and Madge grew older so as to need more education and different style of dress and living, the mother drooped silently and uncomplainingly into the grave.

And Mr. Proctor and even Madge had no idea of the quiet suffering that had hastened her death.

So much of good was perhaps wrought by the sacrifice as would have been but little anticipated by the anxious mother or any one who

was acquainted with the circumstances or the characters in question.

From the era of his wife's death Mr. Proctor had devoted himself to his only child's education, and most certainly the girl had well repaid his cares.

Of course, he could not train her in the more feminine accomplishments, in which she was yet not altogether deficient, for, thanks to an old servant, she could work, and knit, and crochet with rapidity and neatness. And, what was more, she had received from a kindly widow lady living in the same house as themselves lessons in music and singing, in which she made much more progress than many with far greater advantages. She had a sweet voice and tasteful execution, and worked hard to perfect herself in all that Mrs. Wrightson could teach her, and it might be to go far beyond her instructress.

But her chief distinction certainly lay in the attainments so rare among her sex.

She was not only a fair classical scholar, but her whole mind was rich in the cultivation that is uncommon at any age, but certainly at Madge's early youth.

And yet she was girlish in her arch vivacity, her simplicity and unconsciousness of self, while her lovely face and graceful figure gave a charm to all her words and actions and movements of which she never dreamed.

Poor girl! she was too early brought into the hard realities of life to have much time or thought to bestow on such topics.

Her father's means grew gradually less, and his health more shattered, till at last Madge found it necessary to attempt some way of adding to their income, however contrary to her father's wish and his pride.

Mrs. Wrightson aided her to the utmost by procuring her some daily pupils, and also by the sale of some of her needlework among her friends, but still the pay was poor and the channels limited.

Still poor Mr. Proctor grew more and more hopeless and ailing, and his utter depression of spirit was thus vented in the plaint with which he was first introduced to the reader.

Madge listened with her bright, clear eyes, that looked so truthful and brave, tenderly fixed on her father's worn face, and a soft sympathy in her loving lips.

"Dearest father, trust and hope. I am sure we shall find some way of managing, perhaps when we least expect it," she replied. "I can work all day—ay, and night too, rather than see you troubled and sad."

"Alas, my poor child, that is always the way with the young, you fancy something will turn up, and that they can do actual impossibilities. But it is of no use hoping against actual facts. There is no prospect, none that I can see; all is closed by my own folly, and you, my poor child, are the sufferer. It matters not for me, and I richly deserve the punishment of my own faults. But you, young, lovely, helpless, innocent, to be condemned to work and solitude at your age, when you ought to be enjoying all the pleasures and hopes of your sex and station, it is cruel, I cannot forgive myself."

"Father, I am happy with you, if you can but be cheerful and hopeful and well," she said, earnestly. "It is only seeing you sad and suffering that upsets me. And who can be a companion like you, dearest father? So wise and thoughtful. Never think I want anyone else to amuse me."

The father smiled sadly.

Perhaps he knew better than the young, inexperienced girl what were the natural tastes and aspirations of her heart, and that the time would certainly come, if it had not yet, when she would feel the craving for a sympathy all different from any she had yet known.

"My child, the end is not far off. I have scarcely more than can keep us for a few brief months, and then we shall be destitute—yes, actually destitute; and, as you know, without friends to help. They have been worn out long since," he added, bitterly and sadly.

What could Madge say in reply?

She could but throw her arms lovingly round her father's neck and whisper hope and faith in the Almighty, who is ever able to succour in the utmost need.

And Mr. Proctor was perhaps more soothed and animated than he would have confessed by his young daughter's courage and love.

But Madge, when once more alone, was more seriously alarmed at the prospect before them.

She knew so well her father's utter lack of all practical work and management, his almost childlike helplessness in all that needed common sense and judgment, although so distinguished in all intellectual gifts.

She felt that if anything was to be done she must take the initiative, and she set herself seriously to consider what could be her next step to avert the impending danger, and in all good earnest she began to reflect on the means in her power to help.

There was one and only one resource, and that a very doubtful one, that occurred to her.

In her leisure and secret hours, when her father was too much engrossed to wish for even her company, she had occupied herself in writing a tale, which was full of her own graceful imaginings, and all the romance and fervour that was part of her nature.

But still she could not feel the slightest confidence in her own performance, and still less could she consult her studious father as to its merit.

She had a true feminine instinct that Mr. Proctor would be a very delusive guide for an imaginative work.

His had no taste and, as she believed, no experience in that direction, and what might commend itself to his ideas as correct and well written would probably be exactly the reverse of the public taste.

Besides, to whom could she apply with such a work?

Certainly no one that she could recall to her mind at the moment.

She had so few friends and still fewer channels of information on such matters, and thus she was completely at sea both as to its merit and the means of getting such a work published or even examined.

Besides which she had no idea of the remuneration to be obtained, and for aught she could tell the whole affair might be such a bagatelle as to make it absolutely absurd to hang on it her hopes, or even to expose herself to the rebuffs and the possible insults that might be the result of her embarking in such an enterprise.

Such were Madge's wavering thoughts as she sat in her pretty room that night, the manuscript before her, and these difficulties and doubts flitting as it were between her and the manuscript lying before her on the writing-table where it had been penned in those stolen hours from sleep and amusement.

Madge began to read the neatly-written manuscript with a critical eye very different from the half-sportive style in which she had composed the plot and worked out her characters.

Even to her own timid examination it did not appear altogether despicable.

She tried to figure to herself what others might think and what interest it would possess for them, and still, either from youthful hopes or from the real merit of the tale, she could not but fancy many worse compositions had found their way to the public taste.

But how was it to be managed?

She had heard and read of publishers and periodicals, and she now ran over in her mind their various peculiarities, in order to ascertain which would be the most hopeful for her purpose.

And, having made her election, her next resource was in her good friend, Mrs. Wrightson, who might, perhaps, advise her how to proceed.

But that good lady was almost as much at a loss as herself.

"I think, my dear, you should pack it neatly up and write a short, pretty letter to the editor—or stop—I really think I should rather advise you to address Mr. Conyers himself. He is, I have heard, a very courteous, kind-hearted man, and takes interest in literary matters, though he is not exactly sole editor. I have heard acci-

dently of him from some old pupils of mine who come to see me and who have met him at their friends', though they are not personally acquainted with him. And leave it at the publishing office yourself, my dear; it is safer in every respect."

And Madge reverently prepared to obey the decree of this sole counsellor of her proceedings. It was not so difficult as it might have been in many cases, for Madge, young and lovely as she was, had been more in the habit of travelling the streets of London by herself than would usually be the privilege or the curse of her age and sex.

In truth Mr. Proctor had long felt so crushingly the depressing effects of his position that the brighter and stronger nature of his daughter fairly commanded his submission and helpless yielding to her firmer judgment and energy of purpose.

It was therefore with some of this same weakness and apathy of temper that he complied with his daughter's notice that she should not return at the usual hour from the daily teaching of her pupils.

"Very well, my dear; only take care and do not be longer than you can help. There have been so many accidents in the papers lately that you must be very careful. Think what would become of me without you, Madge," he added, piteously.

It might have been almost ludicrous to any bystander to hear the nature of the father's fears for his beautiful child. There were pitfalls far more deceitful than the dangers of the streets, and falls from the true woman's pedestal more fatal than the stumble that so rarely overtakes the young and agile.

Thus, all being made straight and regular in her home relations, the girl set off on her memorable expedition.

The manuscript was wrapped carefully in the approved fashion, a small note, directed in the clear, graceful handwriting of the author, was well secured in the string that bound it, and then Madge lightly stepped into an omnibus going in the required direction, her heart beating high with excitement of mingled hopes and fears and timidity.

But her abstracted thoughts were soon diverted by the unpleasant and obtrusive attentions of a gentleman beside her. He did not exactly do or say anything that she could actually lay hold of to resent, but he so hemmed her in and gazed at her, and now and then addressed her in low, significant phrases that annoyed and agitated her far more than if he had really enabled her to resent his freedom.

Poor Madge longed for every street that took her nearer to her destination. Her eyes were anxiously turned to the door, all unconscious that a kindly, grave look was turned on her from the opposite corner from where she sat.

"Would you like to change places with me?" he said, at length, as the little byeplay became more obvious and more offensive to its object.

"Oh, thank you so much," said the fluttered girl, springing quickly up, while her tormentor turned a dark look on the protector, whose proceedings he was yet powerless to resent.

"You are wonderfully efficacious, sir. You must have been born for an omnibus conductor," he said, at length, with bitter emphasis.

"Better than being an unprincipled cad," was the sharp reply.

And then he coolly handed the young girl to the seat he had occupied, and resolutely placed himself so that she was effectually sheltered from annoyance.

But it was not for long that the guard had to be kept up, for in a little time the omnibus conductor stopped with a civil:

"Here's Fleet Street, miss. Will you get out here? It's the nearest spot for you."

Madge sprang hastily out with a slight bow and glance of gratitude to her protector, and the omnibus rolled briskly on.

She had been too flustered by the marked insult that had been offered to her to be fully present to what was the immediate progress of events around her, and it was not till she had

gone on some yards that she was aware of the terrible fact that the precious roll of manuscript—the sole object of her journey—had slipped out of her muff all unperceived.

The girl was thunder-stricken for the moment. Then she retraced her steps to the spot where she had left the omnibus, but in vain, there was no trace of the packet in which her hopes were centred.

Either she had not lost it in the streets or else some one had taken it up, and in all probability threw it away in the first opportunity that presented itself.

Madge was too stunned and horrified for tears.

She had no thought but of utter despair in this collapse of her every hope, the safety rope to which she hung.

But plaints and wails were of no avail in such an emergency, and she knew it but too well. Her first impulse was to hasten home like a bird to its nest, and there pour out in her good friend's ear the story of her woe. She scarcely knew how she reached the house, she was only conscious of one terrible blank—one despairing consciousness that from her own careless folly she had lost and thrown away the chances of success and help to her suffering father.

And when she had at last sought the humble sitting-room of the ci-devant governess her tale could scarcely be intelligible for tears.

"My poor child, it is indeed sad, but not altogether hopeless. Your address will be inside, anyone who examines it will know where you live. It is of no value to anyone, and therefore there is good chance that it may still be returned to you."

The girl listened with unresisting but unconsolatory patience.

She could cherish no such hope. She did not believe any one would take so much trouble for a stranger, and after the first burst of disappointed buoyant hope and dark despair she resolutely turned from the useless contemplation of the past to strive to repair the error she had innocently committed.

Poor girl—there was but little in her power save what was almost hopeless to repair the loss or avail to accomplish its end. The manuscript was far too long to be replaced under some weeks, and besides there was a sickened hopelessness in the very idea of attempting the rescript of the missing roll.

Still she bravely fought against time; she worked hard and incessantly, in spite of the fatigues and depression of daily toil, the crushing influence of her father's despairing plaints, and her own but too certain sense of their justice.

And still Mrs. Wrightson's comforting predictions failed of their fulfilment.

No friendly hand appeared to return the lost manuscript—no welcome postman restored it to her keeping.

There could be no hope now.

Day by day the danger became more imminent and Mr. Proctor's slender stock of available means was daily diminishing, while debt was still increasing in pressure on the miserable and helpless man.

Madge was powerless to help. She could not hope on the wildest calculations to finish her work in anything like the appointed time, and even when it was concluded the chances of its being ever read, and still less accepted, were slender indeed.

Her spirits failed, her sleep forsook her, although she kept up her cheerfulness before her father, and only excused her pale cheeks and languor on plea of the woman's excuse, headache.

She returned home from her daily tuitions each evening about five, and usually only to meet her father's funeral-like account on the departing day.

"Another day gone—we shall not have many more here, Madge, and Heaven knows where we shall go. I do not believe we can possibly remain together—we shall only starve."

Madge tried to smile away these ideas, but she could not deny their truth, and the gloomy atmosphere remained without a sunbeam to illumine its gloom.

It was on one of these occasions that the girl was greeted on re-entering the house by a letter that was delivered to her in mysterious secrecy by their old servant.

"It was brought here by a young man—very respectable like," she said, "who told me to be sure and give it into your own hands, because it was of consequence, and as my poor master is so worried just now I thought I would say nothing about it but just give it to you, Miss Madge."

The girl took it eagerly.

Any change in the dull monotony of their melancholy life was welcome to her, and she hastened to her own room with a gleeful eagerness that proved how completely she still retained her youthful buoyancy of spirit.

The handwriting was completely unknown to her, and yet she did what is so common in such cases—she turned it and examined it in every direction in order to form an idea where it could possibly come from.

At last she took the more rational course of opening it, and perceived, to her exceeding astonishment, that it was signed "H. Conyers," and that the heading was from the same address as that to which she had been proceeding on that disastrous day of her loss.

The letter ran thus:

"DEAR MADAME.—I shall be happy to see you at my office any day that may suit you between two and four o'clock; if quite convenient to you I think that to-morrow or the next day will be advisable, as I have some proposals to make to you that will need some little time to carry out, and therefore the sooner they are acted on the better. "I am," etc., etc.

Madge rubbed her eyes as if some glamour was over them.

How could this gentleman have heard of her since she had never reached his office to request his notice? Could it be that Mrs. Wrightson's friends had interested themselves on her behalf so as to bring her name and wishes before his notice?

The lines swam before her eyes. She was actually giddy with excitement and surprise. She feared to hope too much, and yet her common sense told her that the very appointment must bear some meaning.

The time of such a man was too precious to be wasted in unmeaning interviews.

Her mind was too much engrossed by the extraordinary and most promising missive for her to remember how the minutes were flying, and a summons from her father was the first startling awakening from her pleasant dream.

"My master wants you immediately," said the servant, with a face pregnant of meaning.

"What is it? What is the matter?" she asked, hurriedly.

"I cannot tell, Miss Madge. He seems a good deal annoyed and flustered," was Franklyn's reply.

And Madge sprang downstairs with a step that would not have killed a spider in its bounding lightness.

Mr. Proctor was sitting, his head resting on his elbow, his eyes fixed on a letter in his hand.

There were but few lines in the page, but they were couched in the cramped hand which Madge, young as she was, had learnt to divine too well.

There were legal precision and sternness in its very aspect, and she scarcely needed her father's explanation to foresee what had happened.

"Madge, my child, it is all over, I, or rather we, are ruined. We shall be turned ere twenty-four hours are over out of even this, our humble home," he faltered, with broken accents and glassy, protruding eyes.

"Hush, hush, papa, calm yourself; there is nothing so bad that it cannot be redressed, except death," she said, gently. "and thank Heaven you are spared to me still and I to you, dear father; we can never be miserable till we part. May I see it?" she said, touching the paper with her small fingers.

Mr. Proctor assented and she read on.

It was threatening enough. There was a copy of a bill of sale on their furniture and effects that could be enforced at any time, and which had been some time executed. Accompanying it was a letter informing Mr. Proctor that the legal deed would be entered up within twenty-four hours of the date unless the money, or at the least part of it, was forthcoming.

She read the letter once and again with sickening terror.

The bright visions of a few months before vanished like a vapour before the east wind.

Even were they realised what would they be in comparison with this gigantic and pressing claim?

"It is monstrous, it is cruel," she said, sadly. "Papa, it can never be—God will appear for us. I am certain He will. We shall not be left in this dreadful plight if we trust in Him."

"My poor child, you are young and hopeful, but the age of miracles is past," said Mr. Proctor, with a bitter mockery in his sad smile. "There is no genii of the lamp who will bring us a shower of gold in the course of the next twenty-four hours. No, no; we must bear our fate as we best can. For me it matters not, but for you, poor child, it is indeed a hard and killing trouble."

There was a suppressed agony in his tone that cut Madge to the quick.

"Papa, dearest, do not fear for me. I can bear all—all if you will keep up. Do not leave me in this weary world alone."

And father and daughter, clasped in each other's arms, exchanged mutual tears of sorrow and love and courage, that might well have moved the hardest to pity.

But the girl did not confine herself to these vain lamentations.

She made a mental note of the name and the address of their creditor, and she spent the night in considering what could be done to delay at the least the impending calamity.

By the time she rose in the morning her resolution was taken, and without a word of warning or of counsel to either her father or the old servant she departed, with throbbing heart and timid, trembling limbs, on her double errand.

It was one of the dark and narrow city streets, or rather lanes, where the office of the holder of that terrible document was situated, and Madge had never in her life trodden such uneven stones, such narrow pavement, or gazed on doorways where such numerous names were painted as inhabitants of the building.

She eagerly scanned the list for the one she wanted, and then mounted the stairs with a misgiving heart; her hand trembled as she opened the door and met the harsh look of the elderly clerk in charge.

"Is Mr. Doveton in?" she asked.

"Yes. What do you want? What is your name?" returned the man.

"My name is Proctor. I wish to speak with Mr. Doveton on business. I will not detain him many minutes."

The man was absent but a short time, and when he returned the door that formed the barrier between the outer world and the owner of the office was opened in silence.

"You can walk in," were the only words spoken, and Madge hastened forward.

"Your name is Proctor—Miss Proctor, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Are you come to bring me the money?"

"No."

"Then that is enough. I have no time for complaints and whinings, and what is more I won't be worried with them. Your father ought to be ashamed of himself to send a girl of your age on such an errand."

"I am not come to whine nor to worry you, nor does my father know that I am here," said the girl, in soft, firm accents. "I am come to ask what I do not think you can or will refuse. It is common humanity, and I take for granted you have the common feelings of kindness and pity," she went on.

"Perhaps I have not, as you may find to your cost. But I should like to know what you have

to say as a matter of curiosity," he returned, with a sort of sneer that was yet mingled with a lurking admiration of the fair young creature before him.

"I only want you to wait for one week, or, if you will not grant that, for three days," she said, earnestly.

"What for? Will your father have the money then—has he any prospect of it?"

"No, I do not think he has," she said, quietly.

"Then why—how do you dare to trifle with me?" he said, rising angrily.

"Because I think it possible—may, more than possible—that I may be able to earn what will help at any rate," she said, looking at him with her true, unflinching eye. "I am not sure, but I shall know in a day or two, and I will tell you the exact truth. Indeed I will, and if it is impossible, and if you see fit—then—then we must submit. But my father is in bad health, and—"

"He is lazy and incompetent, and selfish, that is what he is," interrupted Mr. Doveton, sharply. "If he was not, he would never have exposed a young creature like you to this danger and humiliation. However, you seem of rather a different nature, and for your sake I don't mind this once, and only this once, granting you your prayer. I will wait a week—only a week. I will not hear another word then, except to arrange for payment of the money. You understand this, I suppose, Miss Proctor?"

"I do."

"And will act on it?"

"Yes."

"That's enough. I like your not worrying me with talk. I'm busy. Good day. This day week—not an hour longer."

Madge courted gracefully, and with a brief "I am very grateful" withdrew.

She went on with a lighter heart now to her appointment. It was but a respite, but still she could breathe more freely at the delay she had gained, and when she entered Mr. Conyers's office she had recovered somewhat her self-possession.

But she was rather taken aback as she met the polite greeting of the publisher, and saw in him not the grey-haired, respectable man she had figured to herself, but a gentleman about thirty years of age, with a slight, graceful figure, and a face that betokened at once intellect and what might be rightly termed "sympathising" feeling certainly, that was by no means diminished when he saw the lovely, timid girl who blushed so beautifully as she returned his bow and accepted the seat he offered her.

"Miss Proctor, you would, I daresay, be surprised at the note you received from me," he said, with a half-smile. "But I could not very well enter into the matter in a letter. Is this manuscript yours?" he asked, placing before her astonished eyes a packet that had cost her so much hope and such bitter disappointment.

It was her lost manuscript, there uninjured save by certain marks and curl of the smooth edges that would have conveyed to more experienced eyes the certainty that it had been really read.

"Yes," she gasped. "How did you get it? I lost it in bringing it to you, and—and—it was so dreadful when I had tried so hard."

"Perhaps it was a fortunate occurrence," he returned, smiling, "for the truth is we have so much copy sent in that it is by no means certain that it would have met with much attention. But in this case it was brought to me personally by a gentleman who was in the omnibus with you when you were, I presume, coming to this office. He told me that you were somewhat agitated at the moment of his changing places with you, and that no doubt it had dropped from your muff unnoticed and rolled under the seat, where he spied it out, so soon as you left the omnibus. He did not like to open it, but so soon as other engagements allowed he delivered it to the address on the outside, and—shall I confess it?—the peculiar circumstances of its story induced me to look at it myself," he went on, with a smile.

Madge could not speak, but her eyes did indeed question the result.

"Well," he continued, as if those eyes had really supplied the place of lips, "well, and the conclusion I have arrived at is that you only need a little training to become a really good author, only you must be docile and patient."

"I will, I will, and thank you, so very, very much," gasped the girl, in accents that told of more than common relief. "And is it worth any—I mean can I earn money by it?"

Mr. Conyers was not deceived as some might have been by the apparently mercenary questions. He saw too plainly that it was from a despairing, over-tried heart that the words came.

"Pardon me," he said, gently, "but if I mistake not, this is not a matter of pleasure or fame to you just at present. Is it not so?"

"No, no. It is far—far more than that," she said, colouring.

"Well, well, then I think before we enter on what will require your whole attention and thought I had better tell you at once what I propose as to your manuscript. It is of course only a first effort, but still I believe in my real judgment that there are a freshness and an originality in it which, with some pruning and alterations, will win success. But," he went on, watching the sad doubt that chastened the bright flush of gratified pride, "it may require more time than you can give without some ready cash. I will, therefore, arrange to give you one hundred and fifty pounds for the manuscript as it stands on condition that you will carry out my instructions as to its polishing up. Will that satisfy you?"

"Satisfy?"

Madge's brains literally turned at the gorgeousness of the offer. Surely Mr. Doveton would accept the terms she could offer now.

Then, after the first bewilderment, she remembered that she had not even thanked the generous publisher for his kindness, and tears started in her eyes at the relief and the gratitude which swelled within.

"Oh, yes, yes. If you did but know," she murmured, involuntarily betraying herself.

"May I ask what I could know?" he said, gently. "We publishers see a great deal of sorrow among the gifted ones with whom we have to do. But you are too young for trouble surely except for others."

Madge hesitated, but then she remembered that it would perhaps be needful to ask for money to satisfy their stern creditor ere it would be likely it would be offered, and in a few brief words she explained the truth.

Perhaps Mr. Conyers comprehended more than she explained. In any case he kindly spoke a few cheering words, and then proposed to give her an interview at her own house to explain more fully what he wished to be done to the manuscript, and Madge gratefully and kindly accepted the appointment and took her leave with a lightened and most thankful heart.

Perhaps Mr. Conyers did not immediately turn to his usual employment after her departure. Perhaps he was meditating on the venture he had just made, and yet it had been too fully considered beforehand to make it probable he would repent, but certain it was that his thoughts were bent on the fair young authoress he had taken under his patronage, and he turned to his usual employment with a low and decided:

"There is something wrong, but I shall see when I go there. That girl ought not to be unprotected and alone."

Meanwhile Madge had hastened home on the wings of delighted eagerness to impart her good news, though her utmost speed was not enough to satisfy her panting heart.

"Father, dear father, we are saved—saved!" she exclaimed. "Only listen—listen. It is true, quite true."

But then she fairly broke down and burst into a passion of tears that was the vent of long-suppressed emotion.

At last she summoned coolness enough to tell her tale, and her father heard it with mingled pride and shame, pleasure and grief.

"My child, my poor child, it is impossible

that you can endure such toils, such strain of mind and body," he murmured. "Blessings on you for the filial piety that has been so blessed, my Madge, but it is fearful to be a burden on my own child, and for so precarious a calling."

But the girl soothed and cheered him with her bright joy and enthusiastic hopes, till at last he was content to fall into the pleasant, but dangerous, "something will turn up" apathy that had been in a great measure the cause of his own and his daughter's ruin.

CHAPTER II.

MR. PROCTOR was perhaps justified in a certain uneasiness when the name of the celebrated publisher was brought in by the old servant, and the greeting of the visitor to the host was certainly far colder and more reserved than it had been to the fair young daughter.

Madge was not yet returned from her daily engagement when the publisher arrived, and there were, therefore, at once a greater freedom and a greater restraint than her presence would have induced.

But Ralph Conyers was a man of rare firmness and dignity of character, and few could resist the unflinching determination of his expression and manner when he saw cause to exercise it.

It was only on rare occasions that the bright smile illumined his grave features that gave such exquisite tenderness and sweetness like a flash of soft moonlight embellishing a dark, rugged landscape.

"Mr. Proctor, I am not sorry to have a few minutes' conversation with you," he said, as he took the chair offered him. "It was, of course, impossible for your daughter to conceal from me that there were some difficulties pressing on you that made it incumbent on her both to exert her talents and to face, all young and unprotected, the chances and dangers of the world in so doing."

Thus, as I am about to exert myself on her behalf, it is not a gratuitous impertinence on my part to inquire into the real state of your affairs. If I understood Miss Proctor aright, there are pressing demands on you at this moment, and, when they are liquidated, no adequate means of future support are known to you. Mind you, it was simply from her anxiety to gain an income for herself that induced me, as a man of the world, to draw these conclusions. It is for you to say whether they are correct."

The scholar, the unpractical, the shiftless one sat in perplexed deliberation at the firm, practical tone of the man of the world. He felt that his words were true, he felt helpless and humiliated before that stormy nature and stern principle of action.

"I fear you are right. I have no certain income," he said, hesitatingly.

"Mr. Proctor, I am not so impertinent as to even wish to inquire into the past," returned the publisher. "It is with the future I wish to deal. Your daughter has talent and energy to win for herself a name and a bright career if she is unfettered, and I will do all I can to aid her; but you must do your part, or hers will be but the labour of Sisyphus."

"What can I do? My health is bad, and I have no possible opening for exertion," pleaded Mr. Proctor, impatiently.

"Then I will remove that obstacle, if it is the sole barrier to your exertions, Mr. Proctor," said Ralph, drily. "I am in want at this moment of a good classical scholar like yourself to translate and edit a learned work written in German. I believe you are master of the tongue. I am sure you are well up in the subject. I give you a fixed time for its completion, and meanwhile I shall allow you so much a week, so long as you furnish the stipulated amount of copy. This will be a beginning. I daresay I shall be able to do more for you. My connection is large enough for me to be able to befriending a man of letters."

Mr. Proctor did, in a measure, kindle like a war-horse to the battle-cry, but the insuperable indolence intervened.

"My health—" he began.

"Will be much improved by constant employment and regular pay," interrupted the publisher. "Come, my good sir; there is no alternative for you. Do not throw away the friend your daughter's noble character has won."

He had the influence of a strong mind over a weak one, and ere Madge returned the matter was arranged and the bargain struck.

It was her turn now to receive the attention of the guest.

But how different was his manner to the one he had assumed to the unlucky savant. The stern determination relaxed into a manly firmness and gentleness. Every suggestion was at once clear and confidential rather than imperative, and Madge's quick perception and correct taste at once caught and acknowledged the justice of all he pointed out.

"How good of you to have taken this tale," she said, "with all its imperfections."

"If I had not seen that it showed the author was capable of appreciating and correcting them, I might not have done so," he returned, with a smile. "I am not going to compliment you more than that. It is enough to give you courage. I believe you do not want ability." And this measured praise seemed perfectly to content the beautiful and gifted girl.

Perhaps Ralph Conyers found it far more difficult to repress than she did to dispense with the admiration she deserved.

But he did succeed, both then and at the future occasions when it became necessary, as it seemed, for him to visit their modest dwelling.

There was always something to think of and arrange, either with Mr. Proctor or his daughter, that brought him to the house, and Madge felt the comfort and support without the embarrassment of suspicion as to the object of these frequent visits.

It was so new and so delicious for her to be able to lean on one whose strength and whose judgment commended themselves to her confidence.

Whatever Ralph said was approved. Whatever he suggested was law to her.

She referred to him in every doubt. She looked for his advent as her greatest pleasure. She spent the intervening time in striving to carry out his wishes and ideas.

Was this love?

If so it was perfectly unconscious on her part. She was too Miranda-like to comprehend her own feelings. She had been too devoted to her father not to refer all things to his influence, and she believed that it was on his account and for his sake that she was thus dependent on their new friend's visits.

Thus passed some months.

Ralph Conyers taught the girl how to correct her proofs. He even suggested the sketch of a new story she contemplated, with all the professional calmness of an onlooker or mere literary friend, certainly not as a lover; and if his eyes did rest longer than needful on her sweet features, or his hand clasp hers in warm pressure more closely than needful, it was certainly too well veiled and slight to be noticed by any one far more experienced than the young and simple-hearted girl on whom such marks of preference were bestowed.

But the end must come, and come it did at last.

The novel was published under circumstances more favourable than often attended such a debut, and it only waited the approval of the press and the public to endorse that of the publisher.

Mr. Conyers now stayed away an unusual time. It seemed as if all his work was done, and that he no longer owed any fulfilment of his promise to see the girl well launched in her literary career.

His task was done. Why should he trouble himself more with one so profitless and who had no earthly claim on his time and attention?

Madge secretly mourned over the completion of the work that she had yet been so anxious to finish and send into the world? Was it to be a finish also to the intimacy that had been the very charm of her life for the last three months?

How long and dreary the day seemed, how spiritless was her labour over her new work. How often would her pen drop on the desk and her thoughts wander to those pleasant hours when her labours were cheered and shared by one at once skilled and wise in his counsels and tender in his behests.

"Is he offended? Is he weary of us? No wonder. His compassion did it all," she thought. "It is vain and foolish of me to even dream of aught else now."

But as for the twentieth time these thoughts crossed her mind there was a knock at the hall door that she recognised full well, and her heart beat and her colour varied as the familiar step sounded on the stairs.

But the very consciousness of emotion made her strive hard to conceal it, and her greeting of the guest was miserably brief and cold.

Ralph looked at her in questioning surprise.

"Ah, I see how it is; you are offended with me," he said, quietly placing himself on a chair near her. "You thought I was cruelly neglectful of your impatience, but I have brought compensation for the delay. These are some reviews from the leading papers. The sale is fair, the reception of the work cordial for a first effort. I may say, in short, that your success is now well assured, unless by any carelessness on your own part, which I know will never occur. Miss Proctor, I congratulate you from my heart," he said, gravely.

"It is owing to you—all," she said, fervently. "But," she added, "why did you stay away so long? Were you afraid that I should be impatient and troublesome in the meantime?"

"No," he said, in a constrained tone, "no. I never fear any folly from you, Miss Proctor. But I kept away from you from the same cause that may influence me for the future. I dare not come to be with you—I dare not see you but on one condition—that I am to be always with you, that I shall always have the right of seeing you, that you will be my wife, my companion, my all," he went on, with grave, subdued earnestness, more impressive than passionate emotion.

She did not reply, she could not, and he resumed:

"Listen, Madge, before you answer. I have loved you ever since that first memorable visit to my office—nay, I may say that I was interested in you long before I ever saw you, and my love has increased with every hour that I passed with you and saw all the beautiful qualities of your heart and mind. But I would never tell you till you were independent of me, and free to reply without fear or restraint. Your father is well assured of a moderate income. It rests with yourself to win fame and money. We are on equal terms now, Madge, and you need not fear telling me that I have been too presumptuous to venture to think of one so young and lovely and gifted."

Madge's heart beat so fast and thick that she could hardly command her voice, but at length she managed to whisper:

"If I could but deserve it."

It was enough for the lover.

Ralph Conyers knew too well the truth and depth of the heart he had won to need more assurance of her real feelings, and it only remained for him to ask the consent of the father, which it is almost superfluous to say was readily given, though perhaps not without mingled satisfaction.

In fact, Mr. Proctor was at once afraid of his new son-in-law elect and jealous of the divided claim on his daughter's affections and thoughts.

But he simply dared not demur at such a protector and home for his only child, and in time he learned to realise the full extent of the blessing thus obtained when he saw his darling installed as mistress of a mansion and grounds and establishment such as they had never suspected Mr. Conyers possessed.

And one of the guests at the wedding was the gentleman who had protected Madge in her painful embarrassment, and who had been the real cause of her future prosperity by the kindly care of her lost manuscript.

Mr. Fenton was equally surprised and pleased at the unexpected magnitude of the result from so slight an action, but he in his turn gave the credit to the discerning and sympathising man to whom he had confided his discovery, while Ralph Conyers transferred all the need to the fair and gifted and brave girl who had dared such a formidable enterprise for a father's rescue from ruin.

OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS.

OLD CUSTOM OF KISSING.—Erasmus, of Rotterdam, writes to his friend Faustus the poet (it is the 65th epistle of Le Clerc's edition) in 1499 from England, and commends a custom now obsolete; it is a great curiosity. "Although, Faustus, if you well knew the advantages of Britain, truly you would hasten hither with wings to your feet, and if your gout would not permit you would wish to fly. For, just to touch on one thing out of many, here there are girls with heavenly faces, kind, obliging, and you would far prefer them to all your muses. There is, besides, a practice never to be sufficiently commended. If you go to any place you are received with a kiss by all; if you depart on a journey you are dismissed with a kiss; you return, kisses are exchanged; they come to visit you—a kiss the first thing; they leave you, you kiss them all round; do they meet you anywhere, kisses in abundance; lastly, wherever you move, there is nothing but kisses! And if you, Faustus, had but once tasted them, how soft they are, how fragrant, on my honour you would wish to reside here not for ten years only, but to take up your abode in England for life. We will enjoy the rest of our month together, for I shall see you, I hope, soon."

THE BELGIANS.—The Belgians differ from the Dutch in two essential points, which are quite sufficient to make them incapable of any permanent union: they are French in inclination and Roman Catholics in religion. Their history exhibits none of those striking traits of heroic patriotism which have distinguished the Dutch annals; there is nothing marked in their characters, and though free from the dull, plodding patience and cold calculation of gain which belong to their Dutch neighbours, they are equally devoid of the high-minded courage and ceaseless perseverance which have distinguished them. Though lovers of liberty the Belgians have been dependent on a succession of foreign masters, Burgundian, Spanish, Austrian, or French. The mania of the crusades having possessed with especial favour the nobles of Flanders, they were incited to make every species of sacrifice in furtherance of their favourite purpose. Lands, political powers and privileges were parted with, on the spur of the moment, to furnish means for their expedition. Their wealthy vassals, the burghers of Bruges, Ghent, and other great towns, were thus enabled, by their riches, to purchase their independence. They forthwith formed themselves into communes or corporations, and began to exercise the right of deliberating on their own affairs; they elected bailiffs; they obtained a jurisdiction of their own, and with it a great seal; and evinced their sense of their advantages by building a large belfry or a vast town hall, as a trophy or temple of their liberties. But though the Flemish burghers gained their freedom from their feudal lords much sooner than most other nations, they threw away the boon by their petty jealousies and quarrels among one another. "Liberty," says Hallam, "never wore a more unamiable countenance than among these burghers, who abused the strength she gave them by cruelty and insolence." They have suffered from their faults, their government has been subject to perpetual changes, and their country has been the scene of war for centuries; a mere arena of combat—"the cock-

pit of Europe." The natural consequence of so many revolutions has been a certain debasement of the national character, evinced in the lower orders by ignorance and a coarseness of manners which will be particularly apparent to every traveller. . . . In England, Gothic architecture is almost confined to churches; in the Netherlands it is shown to be equally suited to civil edifices, and even for dwelling-houses. The town halls at Ypres, Bruges, Ghent, Oudenarde, Brussels, and Louvain are most perfect examples of the Gothic style, and it may truly be asserted that nowhere else in the whole of Europe are any civic edifices found to approach in grandeur and elegance those of Belgium. Among the privileges granted to the towns when they first acquired commercial rights none seemed to have been deemed greater, or were more speedily acted upon, than the right of building a belfry to call together the citizens, and a hall as a general meeting place.

THE CHIMES.—Chimes, or "carillons," were invented in the Low Countries; they have certainly been brought to the greatest perfection here, and are still heard in every town. They are of two kinds, the one attached to a cylinder like the barrel of an organ, which always repeats the same tunes and is moved by machinery, the other of a superior kind played by a musician by a set of keys. In all the great towns there are amateurs or a salaried professor, usually the organist of a church, who perform with great skill upon this gigantic instrument, placed high up in the church steeple. So fond are the Dutch and Belgians of this kind of music that in some places the chimes appear scarcely to be at rest for ten minutes either by day or night. Chimes in 1300 were in existence at Bruges.

AN ANTIQUE CINDERELLA.—In the thirteenth book of the "Various History" of Ælian is a fine Cinderella anecdote. Of all the Egyptians, says that historian, Rhodope was reckoned the most beautiful. To her, when she was bathing, Fortune, ever fond of sudden and unexpected affairs, did a kindness more merited by her beauty than her prudence. One day when she was bathing she judiciously left her shoes on the bank of the stream, and an eagle, naturally mistaking it, pounced down upon one of them and flew off with it. Flying with it directly over Memphis, where King Psammethicus was dispensing justice, the eagle dropped the shoe over the king's lap. Of course the king was struck with it, and having found it attached to the person of Rhodope he immediately married her.

THE PLATE TAX.—An order was made in the House of Lords in May, 1776, "that the commissioners of his majesty's excise do write circular letters to all such persons whom they have reason to suspect to have plate, as also to those who have not paid regularly the duty on the same." In consequence of the order the accountant general for household plate sent an application to the Rev. John Wesley among others, and he got a laconic reply which even now may do some good to hardhearted, luxurious people. It ran: "Sir, I have two silver teaspoons in London and two in Bristol. This is all the plate which I have at present, and I shall not buy any more while so many round me want bread. I am, sir, your humble servant, John Wesley."

A YANKEE CAUGHT.—The following neat bit relates how for once a 'cute Yankee was caught in his own trap:

A Pat—an old joker—and Yankee more sly
Once riding together, a galloway passed by:
Said the Yankee to Pat, "If I don't make too free,
Give that galloway its due, pray where then would you be?"
"Why, honey," said Pat, "faith, that's easily known—
I'd be riding to town by myself, all alone!"

THE CITY OF GHENT.—Ghent lies at the junction of the rivers Schelde and Lys, whose numerous branches traversing the town form canals in all directions. In the sixteenth century this was perhaps the largest and most populous city of Europe. It contained 175,000 inhabitants, and Charles the Fifth used sportively to say that he could "put all Paris into his glove—"gant," a good pun. In the tenth

century Ghent was the capital of Flanders, but in process of time the turbulent weavers, among whom a spirit of independence had early begun to work, rose up against their feudal superiors and threw off their yoke or obtained from them concessions and immunities, which formed the origin of popular rights in Europe. At length its burghers became so bold and warlike that they were able to repulse from their walls 24,000 English commanded by Edward the First in 1297. . . Their allegiance both to the Counts of Flanders and Dukes of Burgundy seems to have been little more than nominal. Since whenever these lords attempted to impose a tax which was unpopular the great bell sounded the alarm, the citizens flew to arms and slew or expelled from the town the officers appointed by their sovereign. It did not take long to equip an armament of burghers and artisans, who had weapons always at hand, and who repaired to the scene of action in their everyday or working dress, only distinguished by a badge, such as a white sleeve worn over it, or a white hood. Thus it happened that popular tumults were as frequent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Ghent as they have been in Paris in the nineteenth, and rather more difficult to quell. On the other hand it not unfrequently happened that the seigneur, aroused by some act of atrocity or insubordination, collected his forces together and took signal vengeance. The citizens were mowed down in thousands. Afterwards came the season of retribution. Enormous subsidies were levied on the town, its dearest privileges were confiscated, and its most honoured citizens and magistrates were condemned to march out of the gates in their shirts with halters round their necks and to kiss the dust before the feet of their imperious conqueror. Ghent was several times forced to make such an abject and ludicrous act of submission. The immediate cause of its decline and ruin may be traced to this spirit of revolt. . . Though fallen from its high estate it does not display the same signs of decay and listlessness as Bruges; it is still the *Belgie Manchester*. In 1804, while united with France, it was ranked by Napoleon as the third manufacturing town in his dominions, after Lyons and Rouen.

The first lottery mentioned in the history of England, Jan. 11, 1569, began its drawing at the door of St. Paul's Church, London, and continued day and night until the 6th of May. The profits were for repairing the sea-coast fortifications, and the prizes were pieces of silver plate.

CURIOUS COINCIDENCES.—In a recently published list of appointments and promotions from the War Office, Colonel Dickens, of the 28th Foot, has been placed on half-pay, and Captain Thackeray, of the same regiment, is promoted to be major.

A NOVEL COMPETITION.

On November 25th a number of hairdressers competed at the Holborn Town Hall for gold and silver medals, offered for the best coiffures by the *Société du Progrès de la Coiffure* and by Messrs. Parton and Osborne and M. Oliver Rolland. The various contests lasted till after midnight. Each competitor having brought with him his living "model," as he called her, the ladies were seated in front of looking-glasses, arranged on a raised table.

In the earlier competitions the hairdresser arranged his model's hair according to his own fancy, and a jury of acknowledged masters of the art of coiffure afterwards determined which handiwork was entitled to the prize—the young ladies awaiting their decision with much patience, and standing the ordeal of public inspection with commendable self-possession. The opinion of experts was that these competitions indicated a high standard of ability and taste, and a disposition to acknowledge, more than has formerly been the case, the present aversion of the public to elaborate and heavy coiffures.

The hairdressers complain greatly of the effect on their trade of the simplicity of the present taste, which for some time past has threatened

almost to dispense with their art. It is believed, however, by the best artists in hairdressing that this can best be met by the avoidance of the other extreme and the cultivation of a style which will woo the public gradually back to a fashion more consonant with their interests.

To show, however, that they can execute an elaborate design in head-dressing when called upon, they on the evening of December 3rd entered on a competition in the "*coiffure poudre historique*." In this case the competitors had before them engravings illustrative of the styles in vogue principally in the days of Marie Antoinette, and built up similar edifices on the heads of their models. A notable exception was "*The Duchess of Devonshire*," in one competition, called the "*coiffure imprevue*;" the hairdressers had to resign their own models and their own materials in order to exchange them for those which might be assigned to them by ballot. Among the prize takers were Messrs. Arionx, Moore, Bollig, Boyer, Cappellen, and Soendlen.

THE NIGHT IN THE FOREST.

"How far is it through the forest?"

"Fifteen versts, my lord."

"Ah!"

The speaker, a young man of five-and-twenty, and with an air of distinction justifying the rank assigned to him, shrugged his shoulders as he spoke and looked up at the wild, wintry sky that frowned down grey and gloomy on the wastes of snow that covered the landscape.

"Haden't you better wait till morning, my lord?" said the post-master. "It will be quite dark in half an hour."

"But we can find our way, can't we? It isn't going to snow, is it? The Moujik isn't afraid."

"Oh! the Moujik obeys orders and asks no questions. He dare not."

"Well, then we will go on. I ought to have been at my destination early this morning, and should but for an accident, a station back."

He lit a cigar with these words and sprang briskly into the sledge, which disappeared at once in the forest.

"I know now who he is," said the other as he went back to his warm room. "It is the young Baron Von Berg, who is to marry pretty Countess Olga. The wedding comes off to-morrow, and he was due this morning. I don't envy him his cold ride," spreading out his hands before the stove, "or the risks he runs. I had a mind to speak of them more plainly, but it's best as it is, perhaps, he'd only have laughed at them as idle fears and thought me a coward for mentioning them."

Travellers by post in Russia change horses about every ten miles. For this purpose there are stations on all the main roads. Usually the same sledge is used for the whole journey, but the driver is changed with the horses.

For some time the baron smoked on in silence. The air meantime became keener, the rising wind whirled the snow into his face, the darkness gathered denser and more dense.

"You know the road?" he said at last, addressing the driver.

"Yes, my lord, I have travelled it day and night for twenty years."

"But not often on a night like this?"

"No, but I can't mistake it. It runs straight through the forest, as you see."

"But I don't see. This fine drifting snow almost blinds me. If it should come on to storm, we couldn't see an inch before us."

"In that event," said the Moujik, "we'll have to trust to the horses. They'd know the road even if I didn't."

"Ah!" said the young man, and again relapsed into silence.

How the wind howled. How the branches of the leafless trees writhed and groaned. How ghost-like the sombre firs looked in the gloom. The traveller's cigar had gone out and he now took another. By its light he looked at his watch.

"Twenty minutes since we left the post-house," he murmured. "A quarter of the journey completed. So far so good."

He smoked on after this in silence. The jingle of the horses' bells, the rattle of the harness, the whiz of the runners over the snow, and the crack of the Moujik's whip became so monotonous at last that he began to be drowsy; and no wonder, for he had not been in bed for two nights, having been travelling all that time.

He thought of his betrothed. The Countess Olga was not only as lovely as a dream, she was witty and charming also.

The marriage was one of pure love on both sides. The baron had met her first at Baden-Baden the year before. An engagement had soon followed and the wedding fixed for the winter. He was now on his way to claim his bride. The delay he felt sure was making her anxious.

"Dear girl," he said, "I see her now with her eager eyes and pale face going to the window every few minutes to look if my sledge is coming. Oh! how happy we shall both be when I arrive an hour hence."

Suddenly he was woken from his reverie by the furious swish of the Moujik's whip. The horses seemed to be wild with terror. They were going at full gallop, snorting fiercely.

"What's the matter?" he asked, rousing himself.

"Don't you hear?" cried the Moujik, in a frightened voice. "The wolves! There are a score of 'em—Saint Isaac protect us!"

The young man had often heard of this peril to the traveller during winter in Russia; but had regarded these narratives as more or less exaggerated. Even now he could hardly understand the Moujik's terror.

It was not till he became aware of a peculiar sound, that appeared to be coming nearer every instant, that he awoke to a full consciousness of the danger.

It was a sound compounded of a bark and a snarl, and with it came the patter as of scores of rapid feet on the hard crust of snow: a sound that rose over the tinkle of the bells, the snort of the horses, the swish of the Moujik's whip, and even the moaning of the wintry wind.

His very blood ran cold as he heard it. There was something in it indescribably fearful.

Shading his eyes with his hand he peered into the twilight behind from out of which the sounds proceeded.

We say twilight, for though night had actually set in, the glare from the snow threw a ghastly half-light over everything.

In this dim radiance he saw, or thought he saw, what seemed a wild torrent of black forms, tumbling madly over each other like some black flood shooting down rapids.

But now it was gone.

Only the dark shadows of the far-off firs were seen, and above these shadows the spectral firs themselves, shivering now and then as it were in the icy atmosphere; while high over all swept past the leaden-coloured, ominous storm-clouds. No.

There it was again, resolving itself, as it came nearer, into a mass of dusky forms mixed all together and careering down on the sledge.

He could see, even at that distance, the gleam of a hundred hungry eyes, and hear every moment more and more distinct the snarling and yelping.

"We are lost," cried the Moujik, glancing over his shoulder. "Oh! my lord baron, how they gain on us!"

But the baron came of a long line of knightly ancestors, many of whom had led forlorn hopes, or fallen in hopeless sallies, and he was not one to die without a struggle or even to lose his presence of mind, although in face of the greatest and most unexpected of dangers.

"Courage, courage," he said. "I have my rifle here. I never travel without it. Only keep your horses up to their work."

Meantime the wolves came on swiftly, and it was plain that in five minutes they would be on him.

He cocked his rifle coolly and waited.

"The whole forest is alive with them," he said to himself. "In this half-light they look like hundreds. I doubt if a dozen rifles would turn them back. The very momentum of those behind will impel the mass onward, no matter how many fall in front. Here goes."

He fired as he spoke at the foremost of the gang, a great, gaunt giant, famished with a long winter, who was coming on with head erect, teeth glittering, and hairs on end, while at his heels the hungry pack followed tumultuously, a dark, swaying mass, yelping and snarling.

The mighty beast rolled over stone dead, so sure had been the aim, and for a second of time the pack appeared checked in its career. But the next instant the body disappeared under the advancing mass that poured down on the sledge like the Vistula in flood.

"Faster! faster!" cried the young man, fitting another bullet into his breech-loader.

The frightened steeds required no whip however, instinct made them fully aware of their peril, and they were thundering on now with wildly heaving flanks and strained, out-stretched necks.

"Ha! he has it!" the baron cried, as he brought down another wolf, the one that had taken the place of the dead leader, "and you and you—great heavens! will nothing stop them?"

For though no less than six had now fallen others came pouring on. If it had been a score he had slain it would have been the same.

They were now within twenty yards of the sledge. Two gaunt wolves went down before his rifle.

Now they were within fifteen yards. The foremost was so nigh indeed that the traveller seemed actually to feel his hot breath.

"Faster! faster!" he cried.

Mad with terror the Moujik applied his lash. The horses sprang forward anew as if concentrating all their strength in a last effort, and for a moment the wolves seemed to be falling behind.

But just as the baron was congratulating himself on this there came a burst of howls from ahead, a new troop dashed out of the forest there.

The steeds recoiled on their haunches with a wild snort. A huge, shaggy monster sprang at the throat of the off horse. The sledge stopped with a jerk that nearly threw the baron from his seat, and then the wolves, in what seemed one dense mass, precipitated themselves from front and rear alike upon their prey.

Meanwhile the Countess Olga had been suffering torments of anxiety and doubt. Her lover had been expected long ago, and as the posts ran with great regularity his non-appearance began to be alarming.

As hour after hour passed and the darkness approached the poor girl, who had been walking the floor, going to the window to look out every few minutes, could no longer maintain silence.

"I am sure something terrible has happened," she said, wringing her hands. "I am sure of it."

Her mother tried to cheer her, though herself torn with doubt. "Perhaps," she urged, "the sledge has broken down between two post-stations; that would cause delay in getting another—"

"Do you really think so?" cried the daughter, eagerly. "Do you really think so? But, oh! mamma, that would compel them to cross the forest after dark, and you know the wolves have been so thick there this terrible winter."

Alas! the mother for an hour past had been thinking of this very danger. What could she say to comfort her child?

"Only last week," cried the girl, with a shudder, stopping in her walk again, "they devoured a poor Moujik, as you know, who had been belated—"

"Yes, I know, dear. But it's not likely Carl would venture after night, they wouldn't let him at the post-station. Try to be quiet, my love. Bright and early to-morrow he will be here."

"They couldn't stop him at the station, you know that, mamma, as well as I do. You tell me to be quiet," wringing her hands, "to wait till morning. I shall die from suspense before morning. Even now—"

But she broke down and covered her face with her hands, shuddering.

"At the worst he will be armed," interposed the mother. "He was the best shot at Baden-Baden, as Alexis has often told us. Come, rest your head on me, dear; don't give way so, I'm sure all will be right. Ah! here comes Alexis himself. I have been wondering where he was. He will tell you there is no danger."

The brother, a tall, handsome man, with that blonde German beauty that so many of the Russian upper classes possess, came up to his sister with a quick step, and stooping down kissed her, speaking in a voice of assured confidence that carried comfort to its very tone:

"Look up, Olga, dear, look up," he said, "and bid me 'God speed.' I don't think there's the least cause for alarm, but as I've seen all the afternoon how nervous you are I've ordered out half a dozen sledges, with a score of our fellows, all armed, and am going through the forest as far as the post-station on the other side. We shall be sure to get news there even if we don't meet Carl half-way."

The girl threw her arms about her brother's neck and burst into a tempest of tears and sobs.

"Oh! thank you, thank you!" she cried, in broken words. "You always were brave, you always were good. But there," springing suddenly away from him, "go, go—every minute is precious."

A moment after the sledges were heard driving swiftly away, the bells of the horses ringing out, and the torches, of which each sledge carried two, lighting up the scene till it was almost like day.

Alexis, like his mother, was more alarmed than he would admit.

The night had now fallen, but the forest was lit up by the many torches, and was eminently picturesque—fir trees heavily laden with snow, dark clouds overhead, the whole appearing, for a moment, in the red glare and then fading into darkness behind.

Suddenly Alexis started and turned to a brother officer who sat at his side, one of the guests who had been bidden to the wedding, and who had volunteered to accompany him.

"Hark!" he said. "What is that? Great heavens, not the wolves!"

For that terrible sound which had startled Carl was now heard by the others. It was, however, still far distant.

"I hope the baron has not ventured into the forest," said the officer. "If so—"

"If so," interrupted Alexis, "they are pursuing him. I know that cry well, it is their cry of the chase."

"Forward then," answered the other, "not a minute is to be lost. Whip up, you sluggard."

The Moujik, thus addressed, lashed up his horses, which broke into a fierce gallop.

"Listen," cried Alexis, a moment after, "that surely was a rifle-shot. It is he."

But though they both listened now intently they heard no second shot.

"You must have been mistaken," said the officer, drawing a deep breath of relief. "I can hear the infernal howling, but nothing else."

"No, there it is again. Great Heaven, we shall be too late. There must be hundreds of them, from their noise. No single rifle can keep them back. Forward, forward."

And he rose to his feet, and, seizing the Moujik's whip, himself lashed the horses.

"Yes, there it is again. How gallantly he fights," cried the officer. "One, two, three. He has a breech-loader."

"But it has no effect. He wouldn't be firing so often if it had. He must be miles away, the sound is so remote. Oh! who will break the news to Olga?"

"Nothing," said the officer, "is so deceptive as to distance than sound in an atmosphere like this, half laden with snow. It is as misleading as sound in a fog."

At that instant their horses, which had been tearing along at the maddest speed, suddenly shied wildly, almost upsetting the sledge.

At the same moment a dark, tumultuous mass rushed out of the forest just ahead and swept on like a black, tempest-driven cloud.

"It is a new pack," said the officer, leaping also to his feet and shading his eyes as he peered into the gloom ahead down the long, straight, and seemingly endless forest road. "No wonder the horses shied. Ha! I see him by the flash of his rifle-shot. He is alone. The snow is black with wolves before and behind. Oh, for a minute more of time."

He had cocked his own rifle as he spoke, but waited to fire, for the light that had been shed on the scene ahead by the flash of Carl's rifle had faded, and now all was darkness in the distance there, the torches as yet failing to penetrate so far through the gloom.

Alexis also stood erect, with cocked weapon, while the Moujik lashed the horses again and again furiously. Both the young men held their breath in the excitement. All at once the awful clamour ahead broke into a wild crescendo that curdled their very blood. Then followed a moment of death-like silence. This was succeeded by a sudden breaking away of the gloom in front, the darkness rolling off in what seemed wave on wave of lurid mist as they dashed up and their torches illuminated the scene.

"The sledge is down," cried the officer, in uncontrollable excitement. "The horses are struggling under an avalanche of wolves. I see nothing of the baron—"

"Yes, there he is," interrupted Alexis, with a shout of exultation that ended with a catch of the breath that was almost a sob. "He was only for a moment borne down. He is on his feet again. How he swings his sabre right and left. He has cut a circle clear about him. It is but for an instant only, however. Fire—in Heaven's name fire. We must take the risk."

But that instant had been enough. The other sledges by this time had come up and were now seconding the rapid fire with which Alexis and his brother officer had accompanied the words they had spoken.

The fusillade was incessant, for there were a score of rifles, and every rifle was a repeating one. In less than five minutes not a wolf was to be seen on foot, but scores lay dead or dying around. The rest had fled.

"What an army of them," said Alexis, kicking a dead monster out of his way when the first congratulations were over. "But the winter has been unexampled for its severity, and they are starving in thousands and mad with hunger. We have no time to lose, however. Think of the suspense Olga is suffering! Here, jump in, Carl. These are my famous stallions that I bred myself, and they can go like the wind."

"I owe my life to them in part," said the baron, as he sprang into the sledge. "I could only have held the monsters at bay a few minutes longer." He wiped the blade of his sabre as he spoke, and returned it to its sheath. "It was like fighting an in-coming surf: you mastered one wave, but another was on you the instant after. Nothing but the speed of your stallions saved me. Ah! my poor Moujik, he and his horses both." He added this as he glanced at the corpses. "I must inquire if he has a family, and keep them from want for the rest of their days."

"And are you not hurt?"

"Only a scratch or two which I shall have to ask Olga to bind up for me. Don't talk of it."

But the Countess Olga thought the "only a scratch or two" very alarming wounds, and tended her lover as fair maidens once tended knights of chivalry.

The wounds really were mere scratches, however, except one in the left arm, and that was not serious, so that the marriage took place at the appointed time, the bridegroom looking all the more interesting, the ladies said, from wearing his arm in a sling.



[MY BEAUTIFUL NEIGHBOUR.]

MR. CATTERMOLLE'S NOTE-BOOK.

GOSSET, JUNE, 187.—I do not dislike my own name, George Cattermole. It is not pretty, but it is peculiar, and it suits me; and, best of all, I am not often annoyed by meeting strangers who have the impertinence to call themselves by my family cognomen.

I should have to write George Henry Augustus before it if I chose to set down all my baptismal appellations, but I do not choose. Because one's parents or sponsors were guilty of a folly is no reason why their victim should help wilfully to perpetuate it.

Henry Augustus, my uncle, from whom I got the Henry Augustus, only departed this life a few years back, and all I got from him besides the name was a Chancery suit, which had dragged on so long that if it ever were decided it would have to be in my favour or that of the widow of one of the former claimants, for everybody else connected with the case was dead and gone.

I felt inclined to let the whole business go to the dogs, or the lawyers (which is much the same), but when I learned that it was a widow who presumed to keep up this unjust battle (for my rights are plain as a pike-staff to any person with a grain of reason), I determined to persevere.

For the truth is I hate widows, have done so

all my life, and I do not mean to change at this late date.

If I have a virtue it is consistency. My step-mother was somebody's widow before she became my father's, and I have no doubt that if death had not called for her within six months after my parent's decease, she would have been somebody else's widow before the year was out.

Once let a woman get the habit of being a widow and she can no more relinquish it than a cannibal could his taste for human flesh.

I am a middle-aged man, a plain man, a commonplace man, in so much that I have slight opinion of poetry and romance.

I am exceedingly shrewd and far-sighted, a little irritable when people will stupidly cling to erroneous views after my pointing out their errors; but otherwise amiable and easy to live with, though I am neither to be cajoled nor driven.

I note these facts because I like to see how they look in black and white, though this little volume, in which I have a habit occasionally of jotting down my opinions and feelings, is not intended for the perusal of any other person; but it pleases me to perceive how calmly and impartially I can contemplate my good qualities, and such slight failings as I may possess.

I am in possession of what may be considered ample means if a man remains a bachelor, as I am happy to say I have been wise enough to do, and whenever that Chancery suit is decided in my favour (as it must be sooner or later) I shall be very wealthy.

I do not crave riches, but I know that in my hands the fortune will be properly administered and put to good uses, which could never be the case if it fell into the control of any widow who ever wore bombazine and deluded the weaker members of my sex by an artful melancholy.

Last winter the business occupied me a great deal, and involved so much worry of all sorts that my health really suffered, so when summer came I established myself in this quiet neighbourhood, which struck my fancy while making a little tour through England.

I found a roomy, well-built cottage to let furnished on reasonable terms, and I took it.

The woman left in charge of the house is an excellent cook; her husband cultivates the garden, which supplies me with fresh vegetables, he also milks the cow that affords me good cream and butter.

All other essential details are managed by my faithful old servant, Ferguson, who has been in my employment for many years.

With most people Ferguson would be presuming, for he is very fond of having his own way, but he knows that with me this is impossible, and so he submits accordingly.

The village of Gosset, a quaint, sleepy place, is only a quarter of a mile distant, so that I get my letters in the morning in good season, and London is not so far off but what I can receive my daily paper comparatively early.

My study is a bright, pleasant room, and the view from my verandah is really very pretty—a landscape of meadows and rolling hills and a river in the middle distance; quiet, cultivated scenery of the kind a well-regulated mind enjoys.

I do not like overgrown mountains and preposterous cataraacts, such as many foolish, excitable people rush to see—for even nature can be exaggerated.

I have led a very retired life here, but it suits me. Ferguson and I agreed that I needed complete repose. In many ways Ferguson is a man of judgment, unusually so when under good guidance.

I have even adopted the country habit of dining early. I was a little doubtful about trying this, but Ferguson once had an uncle who lived to ninety just from having chosen this plan in about middle life.

As a rule I sit up late, but here I have fallen into the habit of retiring to rest rather early. Ferguson always likes to put all the lights out before he goes to bed, and he gets so amazingly sleepy by ten o'clock that it seems a shame to keep him up.

During the first weeks of my stay I had occasionally visitors from the village. The doctor used to come up now and then and play a game of chess, but though he played tolerably he never could lose without losing his temper at the same time, and when he went so far as to hint that it was I, not himself, who appeared infirm in that way I felt it was due to my dignity to end that recreation.

The lawyer used to come too. He was a rather agreeable fellow, but frothy. That man, even after my laboriously going over the details of my Chancery suit, could never be brought to see that my claim was certain to succeed. A creature so obtuse naturally soon became insupportable to a calm, well-poised mind capable of regarding both sides of a subject.

I had to give up the clergyman, for I discovered that his views were far from orthodox, and though I am a liberal man I cannot support any approach to heresy, and I am sorry to say that Mr. Cummings's opinions in regard to many theological points were far from being as sound as they ought to have been in one of his cloth.

Two or three other persons, whose society I consented to cultivate, proved equally unsatisfactory, long years spent in a retired place are apt to make men opinionated and stubborn. So, gradually, it came about that my visitors dropped off one by one, and I miss them the less because Ferguson plays a really good game of chess, though he has never but once succeeded in defeating me, and then the thing happened,

as he very justly observed, from my having my head occupied that evening with letters I had received.

AUGUST 15.—I find that more than six weeks have elapsed since I have jotted down any records or impressions in this little book, but as it was never intended for a regular diary I am not obliged to feel that I have neglected to carry out a fixed purpose—which would be a most unheard-of failing on my part, either in a large or small matter.

I was absent for ten days, and only returned about a week since. Some business connected with the suit took me to town. I was not very comfortable, because I left Ferguson behind; I disliked, especially, being forced to do this; for Ferguson had opposed my journey, and even gone so far as to hint that it was unnecessary.

I reproved him sharply, and after that we made our preparations in silence, but the very night before we were to start Ferguson developed rheumatism in his right foot and limped terribly.

He was so penitent over having presumed to set his opinions up in opposition to mine that he wanted to accompany me in spite of his lameness; but this, of course, I could not permit; his presumption had been his fault, the rheumatism was his misfortune.

So I went without him, and oddly enough his foot got well just as I had sent him word that I should be back on a certain day.

He had written to ask permission to join me, and opened his letter to say that he had received my communication after sealing his epistle; but he would send it in order that I might see what his intentions had been.

I was very much annoyed by a piece of news which Ferguson gave me. The cottage which stands next to mine, and which had been empty all the summer, was let; worst of all, to a widow.

"She's named Mrs. Jefferson," said Ferguson, "and she have with her a—"

I interrupted him.

"Let me hear no more," I said, "and let it be distinctly understood that between my house and that no communication must take place."

"There wouldn't through me," said Ferguson, "for they're all women, and I'd rather go into a hornet's nest."

I knew he spoke the truth, for Ferguson carried his dislike to and his suspicions of the sex far beyond what is reasonable, and I have pointed out to him frequently that all women are not widows.

But he entrenches himself in the assertion "that they will be sometimes if they can manage it by hook or by crook," and the horrible possibilities involved in this sweeping condemnation always fill me with such painful food for thought that I invariably quit the subject.

The next day as I was standing at the gate I saw a stout, motherly-looking elderly woman pass. She did not wear weeds, was not even in mourning, so I felt somewhat surprised when Ferguson, who had just come from the post-office, whispered to me:

"That is our new neighbour, sir."

"What's that to us?" returned I, sternly.

Ferguson felt the reproof, bowed, and went his way.

All the same I was glad that she bore no outward signs of widowhood; we must meet in the road now and then, and it was a satisfaction not to be wearied by the sight of weepers and crape and other deceitful ornaments to mark her state and kind.

But only the morning after I heard the frantic barking of a small dog close under my study window, and as I was occupied in mental effort the noise annoyed me terribly.

It proved to be the widow's poodle that barked. In the afternoon there rose a great commotion in the kitchen; a cat had got into the pantry and stolen the cold meat, and it was the widow's cat!

Within the next three days I had twice more been worried by the poodle. Thrice had my food been purloined by the cat.

As a crowning wrong, a little pig broke through two loose palings of the fence that

separated my grounds from my neighbour's, desecrated my flower-beds, ran riot over the lawn, and completed his enormities by dashing between the gardener's legs and tripping him up as he rushed in pursuit of the miserable animal.

I had borne enough. I called for my hat, buttoned my coat tightly over my breast, assumed my severest expression of countenance, and set forth.

I opened the gate of the next house, I walked quickly and determinedly up the path. I reached the verandah. I perceived a female seated seated thereon with her back towards me.

"Ahem!" said I, in order to attract her attention.

She turned.

I saw it was not the owner of those abandoned quadrupeds I had come to complain of, but a servant; from her dress evidently belonging to the lady's maid class: a pert, not to say rakish looking person; exactly the sort of creature I should have expected a widow to choose for a domestic.

"Young woman," I said, "I desire to see your mistress. I am Mr. Cattermole, I live next door. I have endured long enough the enormities of those disgraceful animals, kept here for the express purpose of annoying me. I am a mild man—a patient man, but—"

I could get no further. The woman had risen and was dropping courtesies, and I think struggling with a laugh—odious wretch! But at that instant a voice called from the parlour:

"Julia, has the postman come?"

And through the open French window stepped a young lady. She might have been twenty-six, and was dressed in white. She was as pretty and graceful a lady as it had ever been my lot to look at. I lifted my hat in a little confusion. She bowed and glanced at me with an inquiring expression.

"Ma'm," said the pert lady's maid, "it's the gentleman from next door."

The lady hurried forward with a charming smile and held out her hand, saying:

"Oh, Mr. Cattermole, how good of you to come! I am really ashamed to look you in the face. I only just heard of the annoyance we have already proved to you; I am so very sorry. I have had Muff tied up and the cat whipped, and we are going to kill the little pig. Do forgive us. Say you do, else I shall be quite wretched."

I am no misogynist, I never professed to be, and this pretty little creature was bewitching.

"Madame," I said, "you are very good. I have the honour to present you my respects and to beg you to excuse this abrupt intrusion."

"Intrusion?" she cried. "What a word! It is so kind of you to call. I hoped you would, for we are such near neighbours, and it was so good of you to come after the shocking way you have been treated. Almost any other man would have refused ever to know us."

After this how could I speak of the errand which had brought me? I decided to let her suppose that I had come merely to make a visit.

I took the chair she offered, she sat down opposite me. The rakish-looking maid, meantime, had disappeared.

In five minutes we were conversing in the most friendly fashion. As a rule I do not make acquaintance easily, it is against my principles, but all rules have their exceptions. This was a case in point. No man, worthy the name, could have been cold or stiff in the presence of that lady.

She told me that she and her cousin had come thither for quiet. She had not been well, she had had business worries. They did not want much society, but a neighbour or so was very welcome.

"Thank Heaven," I said to myself, "that this isn't the widow; it must be some young relative under her charge."

Well, we had a delightful conversation of twenty minutes. It was astonishing how quickly she discovered my tastes and how many of them happened to be her own.

Then the lady whom I had met a few days

before made her appearance and I was presented.

"My cousin, Mrs. Jefferson," said this graceful creature in such a pretty, childish way. "Cousin, Mr. Cattermole has been good enough to come and see us in spite of the awful conduct of all your little pets. Isn't it good of him? Thank him, do thank him."

"It is for me to offer thanks for this hospitable reception," I said.

Then Mrs. Jefferson spoke some pleasant words, and after a few moments' chat excused herself.

The proprietor of the house was waiting for her, she said.

I rose to go.

"Why should you be in such haste?" asked the young lady.

"I must not trespass too far upon your courtesy, Miss—"

Then I stopped, feeling a little awkward.

"Good gracious!" she said. "What a feather-head I am. I've forgotten to tell you my name," she laughed, yet looking somewhat alarmed. "I am afraid to tell you!" she cried. "Promise you won't hate me—do promise! Oh, Mr. Cattermole, I am Mrs. Smith! I am the contestant in that dreadful Chancery suit! But we needn't be enemies: we can leave the battle to the lawyers. Say we can. Ah, promise!"

Refusal was out of the question! I felt instinctively that though a widow she had been forced into this odious position in regard to the attempt to defraud me of my rights. I said what I could. I fear that I spoke with an incoherence unusual with me; but the situation was so unexpected, so confusing, that I hold myself excusable. I wanted to take my leave; Mrs. Smith would not permit it.

"If you go I shall think you are angry," she said. "Sit down and let me tell you all about it—it will be a great relief! Oh, when I heard your name and found that we were neighbours I was in such a fright. But you don't hate me quite. Now do you?"

To insist on leaving would have been at once undignified and rude; I trust that in no circumstance am I ever the one or the other. I did sit down. We talked for a long time. When I went away it seemed to me I had known her for years.

She had married Mr. Smith while very young; she was twenty-eight now; "but," as I told her, "did not look her age." Smith was many years older than herself. "He had been goodness and kindness itself," she declared. "When he died she felt as solitary as a poor child lost in a wood."

"I knew so little of the world," she added, piteously; "I shall never, never be fit to take care of myself: I'm a poor creature! Well, could I refuse the dying request of the man who had adored me, for he had? I could not—you feel that—ah, you need not speak, I see it in your eyes! Oh, you are good and kind; your intuitions are so quick that you can read a character at a glance—I thank you, oh, I thank you!"

Then she told me that he had exacted a solemn promise from her to go on with the suit: it had always been a painful duty, it would be still more difficult now.

"So dreadful to be fighting a friend," she sighed. "For we mean to be friends, don't we, Mr. Cattermole?"

"I trust that we are so already," said I, fervently.

Words are never lightly spoken by a man like myself. Though to an ordinary thinker this sudden going against my general principles of action might have appeared an inconsistency it was not so. She had said rightly; I can without vanity assert that I am a profound judge of character; and I read hers so quickly that I knew her as thoroughly as if our acquaintance had dated years back. I knew that in spite of her being a widow, in spite of the false position in which her husband's dying commands had placed her, she was sweet and innocent as a child.

I told her so. I told her, too, that as a few weeks more would certainly see the case settled

in my favour it was not for me to cherish prejudice against her, and she thanked me with tears in her eyes.

"Then we need not think about it," she said. "We will never speak of it! When the matter is decided I shall be the first to congratulate you. Ah, you believe that, do you not?"

I did, and I said so, and we were friends. I had no idea the time passed so quickly; I was late for dinner, and Ferguson was rather cross in consequence, but he saw by my face that I was in no mood for airs on his part, and he subdued his ill-humour.

From that day my intimacy with my neighbours grew rapidly. I invited them often; Mrs. Smith and I took walks and drives; each interview increased my respect for her mental gifts, and the artless creature's admiration of my intellect and judgment was pretty to see.

That she had some secret worry I perceived. At last Mrs. Jefferson told me what it was. A distant cousin was in love with her; she did not want to marry him. But she had such a dread of giving pain that, though her good sense told her she ought to convince him there was no hope, her tender heart could not bear to deal the blow.

When Mrs. Jefferson mentioned his name, Arthur Gerald, I recognised it. I knew the young man for a handsome, reckless fellow, from whom this lovely, pure-souled woman ought to be saved. I stated this fact and Mrs. Jefferson implored me to aid her efforts.

"Annie had such confidence in my judgment," she said, "no one could influence her so much as I."

When Mrs. Smith discovered that I knew her secret she was a little troubled at first, but after awhile she owned herself glad.

"You will help me," she said. "You will be my guide!"

She told me the whole story. She had never loved him. The man who won her heart must be far different! Arthur was too young. If ever she married again, which was a most improbable thing, her husband must be older than herself; a man of firm will, yet good and gentle, upon whom she could rely implicitly. She did not approve of second marriages as a rule. If she were ever led to contract one, her helplessness, her ignorance of the world, her need of a friend and guide, would be her principal inducement.

From the day that Ferguson learned of my acquaintance with my neighbours there was a great change in him. He developed evil traits of character, which even I with my ability to penetrate people down to the very core had never suspected in him. Or rather, as Mrs. Smith said, when my annoyance chanced to become known to her, it was more probable that I had allowed my kind feelings to overpower my judgment; and as I reviewed the past I could perceive that this had often been the case.

At first Ferguson ventured on insinuations and sneers. I put those down with a steady hand. Then he took refuge, sometimes in crossness, sometimes in melancholy; in either phase he was unendurable. He became so insanely wrong-headed and wrong-hearted that he constituted himself a spy upon the next house, and was always hoping to find out some mystery. He learned that Mrs. Smith received many letters and wrote a good many in return. He got hold of Mr. Gerald's name from the post-mistress, and when I condescended to explain the matter to him he presumed to express unbelief, at least by looks and manner, for he did not venture to open his lips.

One night when I invited the ladies to come and have tea with me he pretended to be ill and went to bed. Indeed there was no end to what I endured. Finally I became convinced that Mrs. Smith was right in her opinion that to keep a servant too long was a mistake.

SEPTEMBER 10.—The weeks have gone very quickly; to employ Annie Smith's pretty phrase, "they have fled like a dream."

I have discharged Ferguson and have got a new man, whom Mrs. Jefferson could recom-

mend highly. He pleases me, and is eager to do so.

Ferguson's conduct at the last was abominable. About two weeks since he came into my study one morning and poured out a wonderful discovery he had made. He talked so fast that I could not interrupt him for some time, and when I did, ordering him to be silent, he stood before me in open rebellion, and insisted on finishing his slanderous tale.

The woman Julia had just left him. She had quarrelled with her mistress, and was going away. Of course I learned afterwards that she had been discharged, having been found to be untruthful and dishonest. But she declared that she was leaving of her own accord; she vowed that her mistress had flown into a passion, because a new gown did not fit, and had boxed her ears. Julia said that she had listened often and heard the two cousins discuss their plans. If Mrs. Smith won the suit, she meant to marry Arthur Gerald. If I won the suit, she intended to marry me, because Gerald was poor. She had come to the cottage to live, knowing that I would be her neighbour, meaning to wheedle and deceive me.

All this, as I said, was poured out with a fiendish eagerness and haste which my commands did not stop.

"I expect it'll lose me my place," cried Ferguson, pretending to sob, crocodile that he was. "But I've told! I wasn't going to stand by and say nothing and see you bamboozled by a widow—and bamboozle it is—and you that innocent always that a body may wind you round their finger twenty times a day and you not know it!"

I set the words down as a record of the extent to which human ingratitude can go, as a proof too of the invincible stupidity of an ignorant man. That miserable traitor, after all these years of daily opportunity of studying my character, after the numberless proofs he had had of my perspicacity, my unerring judgment, my unalterable firmness, could remain so utterly blind.

He was an idiot, not worth even anger. I said, calmly:

"Ferguson, you are discharged."

"I expected it, sir," he cried, with more crocodile sobs. "But I've done my duty. Sir, you're a-goin' to destruction—no, destruction has come to you in the shape of a widder!"

After that, of course, I was obliged to say that if he did not leave the house in ten minutes I should send to the village and have him placed within the iron grip of the law.

Ah, the meanness, the baseness of human nature in general, among high and low, is indeed a melancholy spectacle! As gentle Annie Smith observed, it is well that "here and there a man stands up above his fellows, a monument of wisdom, a lighthouse of justice and moderation, to cast his beneficent beams across the waste of darkness!"

Those were her very words. I write them, because they are worthy of consideration.

SEPTEMBER 27.—This news is so important that I desire to record it, though it is not likely ever to fade from my mind. I wish also to note some of the events of this day, while they have the beautiful gloss of freshness upon them, what Annie sweetly termed "the golden radiance of fruition—the heavenly halo of fulfilment."

We have known for a week past that any hour might bring news of the closing of our case. I had thought of going to town, but Mrs. Smith (it seems strange now to write that name) persuaded me to remain, as a favour to her. She should feel restless and anxious.

"She had a presentiment," she said, "that the decision would be given in her favour, and if it should and I not there to assure her of my forgiveness she should die outright."

I knew that she had no grounds to presage disappointment for me. But it would have been bad taste to say so at this juncture, so I held my peace and consented to give up my journey.

I had settled in my own mind that the case would be decided to-morrow, Friday, which is

always my lucky day, and I freely confess that I am not too stubborn to hold faith in presentiments.

As Annie justly says: "We are surrounded by mystery; the wise man recognises this and bows his head."

I went out to walk earlier than usual. I met my servant in the hall, and as he told me he had not yet been to the post, I decided to stroll in that direction. Just at the turn of the road, beyond Annie Smith's house, I met Annie herself.

"I am earlier than you," she said. "I have been to the village to post some letters. I found all this heap of papers and magazines. There are two or three for you. I thought I would act postman for your benefit."

She tried to speak lightly, to smile, but she was pale and agitated, and I saw that she had been crying.

"You are troubled," I said. "Ah, you cannot deceive me! What, what has happened?"

"You see everything," she cried. "Well, I will tell you. Come to the house with me."

We entered her gate. But instead of going to the house we sat down in an arbour in the garden.

"Tell me," I said, "what it is. Your trouble is mine."

Impulsively she put her hand in mine. I would not let her withdraw it, though she tried, blushing beautifully.

"I will tell you," she said, after a little entreaty on my part. "I have followed your advice. I have written to Arthur Gerald that I will never see him again until he promises to regard me as a friend."

But satisfactory as was this news it troubled me to think that doing so wise a thing could make her suffer.

"Annie," I said—I have for a good while called her by her Christian name, she sweetly declared that Mrs. sounded so cold on the lips of a friend—"Annie, it is not possible that you have mistaken your own feelings—that you did care for this young man—"

"You know I did not," she interrupted. "It is not that. I am not thinking of him. I—I—the truth is I have made up my mind to go away."

"Go away?" I repeated.

She stifled a sob, and replied, in a voice which she tried vainly to render composed:

"I must. It will be better. Do not ask my reasons. Do not."

"I have no right," I said, wounded by her words.

"No right!" she exclaimed. "Oh! every right. Ah, what am I saying? Let me go. I am not myself this morning. Later we will talk. Yes, I must leave this heavenly place of rest—leave you."

She hid her face in her hands and sobbed aloud.

I read her secret—she loved me! She did not know that her affection was returned, and she feared to linger.

I did love her.

And now the moment had arrived when, in justice to both, I must tell her so.

"Not leave me, Annie," I said, stealing my arm about her waist and drawing her head down upon my shoulder. "Will you accept my heart and share my name? Dear girl, will you be Mrs. Cattermole?"

Her frame shook convulsively. She laughed, she wept, she was hysterical.

Under the circumstances such weakness could be excused.

"It's—it's only that I am so happy," she murmured, and then wept herself quiet in my embrace.

We had a long, blissful hour together, then we went to find Mrs. Jefferson, and told her what had happened. She rejoiced with us, you may be sure.

Towards dinner time I took my leave. I had got to the gate when Annie came running after me holding up some newspapers.

"We had forgotten these," she said.

As I took them a letterfell out from under the hand of one of the journals.

"Why, I hadn't seen that," she cried. "I might have lost it. How careless of the old post-mistress not to say it was there."

As I picked up the epistle I saw that it bore, at the top of the envelope, the printed address of my solicitors.

"Something about the suit," I said, "I trust it is not to drag on longer."

She begged me to open it.

I did so.

The decision had been given in my favour. I was fairly a millionaire!

I suppose I grew pale. She cried out in terror.

I put the letter in her hand and leaned against the gate; it was due to my dignity not to be overpowered; I struggled, and I succeeded.

"Oh, you have won," she exclaimed. "Joy—joy! You have won."

I put my arm about her again.

"We have won, you mean," I said.

Again she sheltered her face on my breast. Presently she looked up and said, half laughing, half crying:

"How glad I am we knew nothing about the letter until—you had made me so happy. I should have been ashamed then to accept you. Now I'll tell you a secret. If I had won I meant, unless you would share the fortune with me, to run away and hide where you could never find me, and make you accept the money."

Dear, artless child!

"But now," I said, "we shall run away together."

She began to tremble and to sob, but she said:

"It's—it's only I was thinking—I had been so afraid you did not love me—and—I'm so happy."

She ran away as she spoke. She needed, she said, to compose herself a little.

When I got home Thomas, my man, met me in great confusion.

A telegram had come for me the night before and he was suffering so terribly with toothache that he forgot to give it to me.

It was the first news my lawyers had sent; but I did not reprove Thomas for his neglect.

It was pleasant that everything had happened as it did. Annie will always like to remember that she promised to be my wife before we knew whether she or I would bring the fortune, and to her delicate, sensitive nature the pleasure will be great.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.—Three weeks later the widow married Mr. Cattermole. Nine months after she buried him.

The doctor had declared that unless Mr. Cattermole renounced turtle soup and port the gout would attack his heart and carry him off within a year.

Mr. Cattermole was not a man to relinquish his opinions.

He knew his own constitution, and he knew that turtle soup agreed with him, and that among wines port was exactly what he required, and his wife was certain, as she always was, that her husband must be right.

She approved of his resolve to eat turtle daily and drink a bottle of port daily for three months, just to prove to the physicians that he understood his own constitution as they could not.

He carried out his resolution, and his name inscribed in gold letters on a marble tombstone was the result.

Within a twelvemonth after her irreparable loss the inconsolable widow married Arthur Gerald.

JENNY VIVIAN, a Welshwoman, 103 years of age, who had been an inmate of Rashleigh Almshouses, Polmear, near Par, Cornwall, for some years, died on Thursday, the 2nd instant.

A PARIS correspondent telegraphs that apartments are now being got ready at the British Embassy there for Queen Victoria, who is to pass

through the French capital on her way to Germany for the wedding of Prince William of Prussia.

KING POMARE V., who has ceded his kingdom of Otaheite to the French, has received in exchange the rosette of officer of the Legion of Honour—a decoration which may be bought for 50 centimes in the Palais Royal. In winter time this rosette will be a welcome addition to King Pomare's scant costume, which consists only of top boots and a cutaway coat.

THE late Lord Mayor during his year of office entertained no less than 12,000 visitors at various banquets, déjeuners, etc., while more than 5,000 other guests partook of his hospitality at ré-unions, conversaciones, or the like.

TEN YEARS AGO!

"TEN years ago! how long, how long!"

Says little daughter Nell;

"And think, mamma, I was not born, Nor John, nor sister Bell!

Pray, were the fields as green as now, And did the apples grow

As rosy and as beautiful,

Mamma, ten years ago?"

I answered, as all mothers should,

The little one, whose eyes

Were fixed on mine, expecting truth,

At least, in my replies!

For sad to say, some children go

Untaught from day to day

Because the little questioning things

Are "so much in the way."

I told her how, ten years before,

The wedding bells were rung,

How her papa and I "went home,"

And bridal songs were sung!

How from the same old apple trees

The luscious fruit rained down,

And helped to grace the ample board,

"King sweets" and "russets" brown.

I told her that my wedding wreath

Was made of rare white blooms

That blossomed in the self-same bed

From which she decked our rooms.

The same snow-cup, yet not the same,

The same pale waxen glow,

And balmy odour that I loved

So much ten years ago!

Now ten years MORE have passed away

Since I my story told

To little Nellie standing there

With curls like burnished gold!

To-morrow she will be a bride,

And wear a wreath like mine,

And choice fruit from the "dear old

place"

Shall at the banquet shine!

M. A. K.

STATISTICS.

FATALITY OF SMALLPOX IN LONDON.—The prevalence and fatality of smallpox in London have shown a marked increase during the past few weeks, threatening a revival of the epidemic which commenced in 1876, and has never since died out. The deaths from this disease within registration London, which were but 56 and 57 in 1874 and 1875, rose to 735 and 2,544 in 1876 and 1877, and declined again to 1,416 and 458 in 1878 and 1879. In the first three-quarters of this year the fatal cases were respectively 122, 144, and 49, while 54 were recorded during the first seven weeks of the current quarter. They averaged 4 per week in September, 5 in October, and were 7, 17, and 10 respectively in the first three weeks of November. Since the end of September there has been a severe outbreak of smallpox in East London, notably in Bethnal Green; indeed, of the 54 fatal cases recorded

during the past seven weeks no less than 31 were of residents of East London. The immunity from fatal smallpox which the nineteen large provincial towns have enjoyed since the beginning of 1878 forms a striking contrast to the continued prevalence of the disease in London. The recorded deaths from smallpox in the nineteen provincial towns, which have an aggregate population rather larger than that of London, have been but 28 since January 1, 1878, while in London they have numbered no less than 2,243.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A DELICIOUS WAY OF COOKING A RABBIT.—Take a nice fresh rabbit, cut it into joints, and fry it brown with some slices of pickled pork, and some onions, shred fire. When nice and brown, take it out of the frying pan and put it into a stew-pan with water sufficient to cover it. Pepper and salt to taste; thicken with some flour and butter; add forcemeat balls, but be sure not to put the fat out of the frying pan. Let the gravy be the thickness of rich cream.

SAUCE FOR ROAST BEEF.—Grate horse-radish on a grater into a basin, add two tablespoonfuls of cream, with a little mustard and salt, mix well together, add four tablespoonfuls of the best vinegar, and mix the whole thoroughly.

PLUM CAKE.—One pound flour, half-pound butter, half-pound dark moist sugar, half-pound currants, half-pound raisins, half-pound mixed candied peel, quarter-pound sweet almonds, one ounce mixed spice, half-ounce grated lemon rind, one tablespoonful brandy, one teaspoonful carbonate soda, ditto of tartaric acid, milk; dry and sift the flour, wash and pick the currants, and stone the raisins; well mix all the dry ingredients together, beat the butter to a cream, and mix well in the dough; add sufficient cold milk to form a stiff paste; bake in a hot oven.

MISCELLANEOUS.

For the production of Roquefort or ewes'-milk cheese, 450,000 breeding ewes are kept in the locality giving it the name.

HIPPOPHAGY in France is steadily increasing both in the capital and the provinces. Horse-flesh now varies in price from 2½d. to 3d. per pound.

At a wedding feast at Knoxville, Tennessee, recently, arsenic was accidentally used for seasoning the food, and 27 of the guests were poisoned. Nine have died.

A MAN in Utah who has only the legal number of wives is spoken of as, "comparatively speaking, a bachelor."

REFINEMENT IN HANDCUFFS.—The Durham county police have had 500 pairs of handcuffs nickel-plated.

Two ladies went to see Sarah Bernhardt. In one of the most affecting passages of the play, when the house was hushed in stillness, one lady who had been using her opera-glass attentively remarked to the other, "Pooh! The trimming on her dress is nothing but Hamburg edging, after all."

At Sittingbourne, the other day, a boy accidentally found a parcel containing what appeared to be several pounds' worth of half-crowns and florins concealed on a railway bank near Station Street. On examination, however, it was found that they were spurious coins, but marvellously good counterfeits, and were wrapped up in paper in several small quantities.

A CERTAIN legal "inn" has got a reputation that would destroy any inn for the accommodation of man and beast, namely, for bad wine. When a certain bencher, with the reputation of being a wit, was told by a member of that inn that he "didn't think much of the wine," the only reply he got was, "You'll think more of it to-morrow."

CONTENTS.

Page	Page
A SPRIG OF MISTLETOE ... 198	HOUSEHOLD TREASURES ... 215
VERA'S VENTURE ... 197	MISCELLANEOUS ... 215
PACKET ... 201	CORRESPONDENCE ... 216
ZILLAS THE GIPSY; OR, LOVE'S CAPTIVE ... 201	
RESCUED FROM KIN (COMPLETE) ... 205	
OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS ... 209	
A NIGHT IN THE FOREST ... 210	ZILLAS THE GIPSY; OR, LOVE'S CAPTIVE, commenced in ... 908
A NOVEL COMPETITION ... 210	
MR. CATERMOL'S NOTE-BOOK ... 212	VERA'S VENTURE commenced in ... 215
REFINEMENT IN HAND-CUFFS ... 213	
POETRY ... 213	A SPRIG OF MISTLETOE commenced in ... 920
STATISTICS ... 215	

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

OUR CORRESPONDENTS are informed that no charge is made under any circumstances for advertisements appearing on this page.

C. G.—The nicest preparation for chapped hands is composed of quince seeds and whiskey. There is no rule as to proportion. Put the seeds in a bottle, and pour in enough whiskey to cover them. As this thickens add more whiskey until it is of the right consistency. This healing preparation is far superior to glycerine, as it dries off quickly and leaves a most agreeable odour.

S. B.—To stop bleeding from the nose when it becomes excessive: If the finger is pressed firmly upon the little artery which supplies blood to the side of the face affected the result is accomplished. Two small arteries branching up from the main arteries on each side of the neck, and passing over the outside of the jaw-bone, supply the face with blood. If the nose bleeds from the right nostril, for example, pass the finger along the edge of the right jaw till the beating of the artery is felt. Press hard upon it, and the bleeding will cease. Continue the pressure five minutes, until the ruptured vessels in the nose have time to contract.

GEORGE.—It is said that a shilling's worth of wheatmeal bread contains three times more flesh-forming, 70 times more heat-producing, and three times more bone-forming material than is to be found in one shilling's worth of beefsteak, but we agree with you that the alleged fact is difficult to realise, that beefsteak and other flesh food is too palatable to be discarded, and that the great majority of the working classes are likely to believe in it for a considerable time to come.

A. M.—The new Lord Chief Justice of England was born on December 3, 1821, and was called to the bar at the Middle Temple in 1847. He was Solicitor-General from 1893 to 1897, and then Attorney-General until he was raised to the bench in 1893.

J. B.—We do not know of an evening school in your neighbourhood—but you can easily find out for yourself. There is a very useful book now being published in penny weekly numbers by Ward and Lock, called the "Universal Instructor; or, Self Culture for All." You would do well to take it in.

S. F.—Insects and worms have colourless and cold blood. Animals with cold blood are always more tenacious of life than those with warm blood.

M. H.—There is no better feed for fowls when moulting than sunflower seeds. For the production of the largest quantities of eggs, the Leghorns, Spanish, Houdans, and Hamburgs may be counted the best. These varieties are generally non-sitters, and during the milder portions of the year they lay generously and satisfactorily, if attentively cared for.

L. S. A.—To whiten the hands, take a wineglassful of the best cologne water and another of fresh lemon juice, and scrape into the mixture two cakes of the best brown Windsor soap. Mix well in a mould, and when hard it will be found an excellent soap for the toilet.

HOUSEKEEPER.—Young, plump, well-fed, but not too fat poultry are the best. The skin should always be finely grained, clear and white, the breast full, fleshed and broad, the toes pliable, and easy to break when bent back. The birds must always be heavy in proportion to their size. This applies to fowls. As regards ducks and geese, their breasts must also be very plump, the feet flexible and yellow. When they are red and hard, and the bills of the same colour, the skin full of hairs, and coarse, they are old. For boiling, the white-legged poultry must be chosen, because when dressed their appearance is by far more delicate; but dark-legged ones are more juicy, and of better flavour when roasted. The greatest precaution ought to be taken to prevent poultry from getting at all tainted before it is cooked; unless the weather be very warm it should be kept for a day or two at the least, and a great deal longer in the winter. Pigeons are the better for being cooked the same day they are killed, for they lose their flavour by hanging for ever so short a time. Turkeys are both tough and poor eating if not kept long enough. A goose should hang up for some days in the winter before it is cooked. The same rule applies to fowls in the cold season. Take great care to cook your poultry thoroughly, for nothing is more revolting to the palate than under-done poultry.

SNIDER, BOX OF MACHINERY and SHYLOCK, three China rangers, would like to correspond with three young ladies between eighteen and twenty-five.

GERTRUDE and ETHEL, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Gertrude is twenty-two, medium height, dark hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of music and dancing. Ethel is twenty, medium height, fair, light hair, blue eyes, good-looking, fond of home and children. Respondents must be twenty-two and twenty-three, tall, dark, of a loving disposition.

X. Y. Z., young foreigner, twenty-seven, medium height, would like to correspond with a young lady, English, French or German, between eighteen and twenty-two, with a view to matrimony.

HALLELUJAH JACK, HAPPY TEDDY and FITCH THE TURK, three seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Hallelujah Jack is tall, fair, light hair, blue eyes, fond of home and children. Happy Teddy is medium height, good-looking, light hair, hazel eyes, fond of home and children. Fitch the Turk is medium height, good-looking, dark hair, grey eyes, fond of music and dancing.

JACK STROP, KEELHAULER and PILLAR OF THE NAVY, three seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Jack Strop is fair, brown hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition. Keelhauler is twenty, tall, dark, blue eyes. Pillar of the Navy is twenty-one, medium height, fair, brown hair, hazel eyes, fond of home and children.

IN NOTHING TIME.

I MOVED alone through the pasture high,
As the woods were turning colour,
And a softness and sweetness were bright in my eye,
With a feeling of sadness and dolor;
For under the trees on the withered leaves,
Like raindrops, now falling, now stopping,
Came the gentle sound which the ear receives
From the full-blown chestnuts dropping.

And I could but recall a vista of old,
When, alone with a soft-haired maiden,
I strolled 'neath the branches of scarlet and gold,
With the same simple treasures laden;
And, groping with staff in the leaves fallen down,
I broke from their thorny caskets
The polished hulls of the chestnuts brown
For the depths of our ozier baskets.

Her head was as bright as the goldenest calms
In the Indian summer weather;
And how often our timid and searching palms
How often they came together!
The brisk little squirrels skipped blithe overhead,
Their stores for the winter-time hiding;
Sometimes through the grass a grey rabbit sped,
Or some shy little crickets went gliding.

Or, out of pure love of us, bending down there,
A late bird bursts into singing,
While, circling on high in the rich-tinted air,
The black crows were cawing and winging.
But they formed only types in the general scene
For hearts that were loving and lowly—
That gave to our dull occupation serene
And innocent grace that was holy.

Ah! pit-a-pat sounds of the nuts dropping low
Ye are only with old music laden,
Since under the leaves of a churchyard I know
Long has rested my bright little maiden;
But I love it, I love it, while memories abide,
While my heart is still gentle and lowly;
And it seems that a form passes now by my side
With a step that goes softly and slowly. N. D. U.

TRY MY LUCK, tall, good-looking, fond of home and dancing, would like to correspond with a young lady. Respondent must be between twenty and twenty-four, medium height, fond of home and children.

BETTY and ANNIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Betty is twenty-nine, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes, fond of home. Annie is twenty-one, dark, of a loving disposition. Respondents must be between twenty-five and thirty-five, dark.

TRUE BLUE, medium height, fair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young lady. Respondent must be good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of music.

POLLY, JENNY, EMILY and ANNIE, four friends, would like to correspond with four young men with a view to matrimony. Polly is twenty-two, dark, of a loving disposition. Jenny is twenty-one, dark, fond of music and dancing. Emily and Annie are nineteen, dark, medium height, fond of music and singing.

FAITHFUL NELLIE, WILLY POLLIE, ROSIE BESS, LACHESIDE ADA, SWEET MAY, LOVING ANNIE, six friends, would like to correspond with six young gentlemen not over twenty.

DARK-EYED MINNIE, eighteen, medium height, brown hair and eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman with a view to matrimony. Respondents must be tall, of a loving disposition, fond of home and music.

LIVELY FLOST, seventeen, tall, dark, would like to correspond with a young gentleman.

HORRIBLE, ARTFUL and CRAFTY, three Royal Marines, would like to correspond with three ladies with a view to matrimony. Horrible is fair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home. Artful is short, good-looking, grey eyes, fond of home and music. Crafty is good-looking, dark, fond of home.

BLUE BELLE, twenty-six, fair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a sailor or tailor between twenty-six and forty.

D. S. and F. B., two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. D. S. is tall, fair. F. B. is seventeen, tall, dark, fond of home and children.

WILLIAM M., stoker in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony. He is twenty-four, medium height, dark eyes.

HOBATIO, tall, brown hair, hazel eyes, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony.

SLICE, HANDSOME CHARLIE, TOP GALLANT FUNNEL, and SEMAPHORE HAL, four seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with four young ladies. Slice is medium height, dark, of a loving disposition. Handsome Charlie is tall, dark, good-looking. Top Gallant Funnel is medium height, dark, fond of home and music. Semaphore Hal is medium height, dark, of a loving disposition.

A. J., twenty-one, brown hair, blue eyes, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady between seventeen and twenty.

LORD DUNSWORTH, twenty-one, tall, dark hair and eyes, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony. Respondents must be about the same age, dark, good-looking, fond of music and dancing.

RESERVED, a clerk, nineteen, tall, fair, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age.

ANNIE, seventeen, medium height, dark hair and eyes, would like to correspond with a tall, dark, young gentleman about twenty-two.

A. W. T., twenty-two, tall, dark, good-looking, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young lady between eighteen and twenty with a view to matrimony.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

A. J. is responded to by—Joyful Jessie.

ALICE by—Roby, twenty, medium height, fair, good-looking.

CHARLIE by—Rosa, nineteen, tall, brown hair, hazel eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home.

HARRY by—Mora, eighteen, medium height, good-looking, fond of home and dancing.

S. S. by—Modest Emily, twenty, medium height, fair, brown hair, grey eyes.

GERMAN by—Millicent E., tall, dark, of a loving disposition.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN by—Wilful Amy, seventeen, fair, medium height, fond of home and children.

ALICE by—William.

ANNIE L. by—Henry, dark hair and eyes, of a loving disposition.

FRED by—Violet, eighteen, medium height, fair hair, grey eyes.

HARRY by—Lily, eighteen, medium height, good-looking.

ALICE by—Hard to Port, twenty, medium height, blue eyes.

BUTTERCUP by—Timonogie, twenty-two, blue eyes, medium height, fond of home and music.

ALICE by—Fighting Lantern, twenty, medium height, hazel eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home.

ARION by—Florrie, twenty-two.

ORION by—Nellie, twenty.

HARRY by—Siss, nineteen, medium height, fair, of a loving disposition.

CHARLIE by—Emily, twenty-eight, of a loving disposition, fond of home.

CHARLES by—Mabel, twenty-one, tall, dark hair.

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